P.P.C.

BY
NATALIE
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LINCOLN

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"The Blue Car Mystery," "The Cat's Paw," "The Missing Initial," "The Unseen Ear," "The Dancing Silhouette," etc.

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P. P. C.

CHAPTER I

THE RED GARDENIA

THE taxicab stopped at the side of the road with a jerk and the chauffeur tapped on the glass window partition which separated him from his passenger. The tapping was barren of results and his attempts to push down the window were equally futile. The wind howled through the bare trees, drowning out all other sound, and carried the rain swirling against the wind shield.

After a moment's wait, the chauffeur climbed laboriously to the ground. It was late, far after midnight, and he had worked both hard and long.

"Hey, mister!" He poked his head and shoulders inside the door of the car. "I ain't acquainted with this here Massachusetts Park. Which road do you take—that to the right, or straight ahead?"

His question fell on deaf ears apparently, for no reply was vouchsafed. The chauffeur tried to turn on the dome light but that, like other parts of the car, was out of repair. Only the dim outlines of the passenger were faintly visible in the blackness of the night,

and they were eked out by the chauffeur's recollection of the glimpse he had had of a top-hatted figure, clad in a fur overcoat, which had hailed him on Seventh Street near the city wharves.

"Drunk!" grumbled the chauffeur. "'Ere, old top, I ain't got time to play nurse; wake up!"

He reached forward, intending to shake the figure seated in the far corner of the car. Instead of grasping an arm or hand, the chauffeur's groping fingers clutched a metal object protruding from the pocket of the fur overcoat. The feel of its flat, smooth surface and screw top brought a pucker to the chauffeur's lips, which creased into a smile as he drew out the flask. Raising it to his ear, he shook it gently; there was liquor in it still, and good liquor, he decided after unscrewing the top and sniffing the flask's contents.

"The old soak won't need it," he muttered under his breath; "an' he can't tell me now where to take him. I reckon we'll stay here till morning." He shivered as the cold wind struck him, penetrating his none too thick suit of clothes and sweater, worn in lieu of an overcoat. The man closed the car door, swung back into his seat behind the wheel and drew an old blanket around him, then, thoroughly comfortable as far as circumstances permitted, he drank out of the flask. Soon one swallow led to another and, as the powerful stimulant took effect, the chilled blood coursed more freely through his veins and a warm glow suffused

him. He had about drained the flask, when his head fell forward, his chin tucked itself under the protruding blanket and he slept.

The steady, unceasing patter of the rain drowned the faint sound made by four furry paws as they touched the water-soaked ground. Once, twice, three times the dog circled the parked car, then stood with cocked head, listening to the drip, drip of the water on the roof of the machine. Cautiously, with never a sound, the animal climbed into the front seat by the slumbering chauffeur, sniffed him over, licked the moisture from the window pane and pressed it's cold nose against it in a vain attempt to see inside. As silently as it had come, the dog leaped to the ground and stole through the woods which skirted the road.

A wintry sun was sending its rays directly across the chauffeur's face, when he opened his eyes to encounter the steady glare of a motor cycle policeman.

"Why, why—what?" he stammered, conscious that he was being dragged out of his seat. "W-wha's th' matter?"

"Hell!" was the cryptic answer. "Where'd you collect your passenger?"

"Over on Seventh Street 'bout two o'clock." The rough handling he was getting brought back the chauffeur's befuddled wits. "I misremembered the address, so we parked 'ere 'cause he was too drunk to tell me again."

"He!" The policeman's strong arm propelled the chauffeur to the door of the taxi, held open by a white-faced man in golf trousers. "He, did you say—look there!"

The chauffeur raised his head and as he peered inside his jaw dropped and his skin crawled.

Facing him in the far corner of the taxi sat a woman, her eyes wide and staring. The ghastly whiteness of her cheeks was in startling contrast to the black gown she was wearing. The gardenia on her breast was no longer white, instead its petals were a sinister red from the blood trickling over them.

"A lady!" The chauffeur's trembling knees crumpled under him and he sagged toward the ground in spite of the policeman's efforts to keep him erect.

"Mary Langhorne." The name was pronounced by the man at the door and his horror-stricken tones pierced even the chauffeur's benumbed brain. "The bride of Senator Barry Langhorne."

CHAPTER II

A HOUSE OF MOURNING

THE whirring of machinery, the rush and roar of a daily paper going to press, was music in the ears of Frederich Ord Brent, known throughout his collegiate career as F. O. B. Brent, and he left the express elevator in the Eames Building with a sense of elation that he was one of the units, no matter how insignificant, in the publication of the Washington *Argosy*. Only recently, and by dint of much perseverance and pull, the two essential P's in the alphabet of life of a budding reporter, had Brent been successful in his pursuit of a position on the reportorial staff of the *Argosy*.

Intent only on getting his story down in black and white, Brent sought one of the typewriters in the city room, and rattled along, at first slowly, then as ideas came more swiftly, the machine clickity-clacked its way to the close of the article. A glance at his watch showed Brent that he had but a moment's grace before turning in copy; he was still correcting typographical errors on the sheets in his hand when he walked over to the copy desk and reached down to pick up a sharper pencil.

"Whatta story! Ye gods, whatta story!" The

proof reader's excited tones caught Brent's attention and he looked over the man's shoulders at proof of the front page of the noon edition of the *Argosy*. Its glaring headlines stared back at Brent as the meaning of the words dawned upon him.

SENATOR'S BRIDE FOUND DEAD IN TAXI
BEAUTIFUL MARY LANGHORNE STABBED
SUICIDE THEORY SCOUTED

"Gimme—gimme—the paper!" Brent's almost inarticulate words were spoken pantingly and the proof reader looked up in alarm in time to see young Brent swaying on his feet.

"Sit ye doon!" he exclaimed, his Scotch origin coming to the surface as he grabbed the chair next to him and shoved Brent into it. "What's come over ye?"

The question was wasted on thin air. Brent, his elbows propped on the desk before him, was devouring the printed proof, his chin resting in his cupped hands.

"A shocking tragedy unfolded itself this morning in fashionable Massachusetts Park"—the news story ran—"in the discovery by Motor Cycle Policeman James Ryan of the body of a dead woman in a taxicab parked on Normanstone Drive. The driver of the taxi, Ernest Page by name, found asleep behind the steering wheel, denies all knowledge of the crime, if crime it was and not suicide, and insists, with terrified vehemence, that his passenger was a man when he

stopped his car in Massachusetts Park to inquire the correct address to which to take him.

"This was approaching three o'clock in the morning and Page admits that he remembers nothing after resuming his seat in the car, where he promptly fell asleep. He is held at the Tennallytown Police Station while his story is being investigated.

"The body was identified by Carl Ashby"—the words swam before Brent and he ran his fingers across his eyes before reading the remainder of the article. In his agitation he accidentally skipped a number of paragraphs.

"The announcement of the marriage ten days ago in Rockville, Maryland, of Mary Wagstaff to Barry Langhorne, Junior United States Senator from Maryland, caused more than a ripple of excitement in the social circles to which both belong"—Brent read feverishly as the copy reader reached for the proof. "Up to the hour of going to press, our representatives have been unable to locate Senator Langhorne . . . the body. . . ." Brent clung to the proof long enough to read the bottom line of the column . . . "has been taken to Mrs. Langhorne's late residence, the home of her stepfather, Professor Charles Endicott. . . ."

Brent thrust his typed story into the hands of the friendly copy reader.

"Turn it in for me," he said. "I've got to get out of here—*quick*."

To Brent, in his burning impatience, the express elevator lagged on its downward plunge to the ground floor; he was out of the building and away before one of the regular *Argosy* messengers could catch him at the street entrance. His car was parked some distance up the street. The engine, however, was still warm from his trip from Baltimore and a minute later he was threading his way in and out of traffic through the business section of Washington City. At Dupont Circle he brought the car to an abrupt stop to the annoyance of the chauffeur just behind him, who averted a collision by a dextrous turn of his wheel. Brent was deaf to the imprecations hurled at him by the irate driver, as, after a moment's hesitation, he continued straight out Connecticut Avenue, his varying speed regulated by his churning thoughts. But on approaching a large brick house in Woodland Drive, set back among a number of age-old oak trees, Brent drove in second gear, coming to a final pause just behind an undertaker's wagon drawn up before the front door.

The butler, busily engaged in signing for a sheaf of telegrams, motioned Brent into the living room at the right of the square entrance hall and then, called away by the undertaker's assistant, forgot the young reporter's existence, much less his presence in the house.

Brent waited uneasily in the darkened room; he

had hardly ventured to hope that he would gain admittance; his last interview with Mrs. Charles Endicott had shown him that he was not a welcome guest in her home.

The blinds of the four windows, through which sunshine usually came, were closed, giving to the room a hushed and solemn air. Brent tiptoed across the Oriental rugs to a wing chair and seated himself gingerly in its soft depths. He had been there for more than five minutes when a sound in the adjoining dining room reached him and he turned his head to glance at the drawn portières near which he was sitting.

"Miss Caroline," a woman's voice, slightly nasal, smote his ear, "Professor Endicott said you were not to use the coupé to-day."

"Why not?" The soft musical tones held a haunting quality and young Brent moved uneasily in his chair.

"Why not?" with scandalized emphasis. "With poor Miss Mary lying upstairs dead and you talk about wanting to use *her* car! Haven't you any feeling?"

"How silly!" The exclamation was almost a drawl and brought a snort of indignation from the older woman. "Of course I care." An unmistakable catch in the soft voice interrupted the speaker and it was a second before she continued. "But he doesn't understand about the car—"

"Miss Caroline"—rudely breaking in—"this is no occasion to cross him; be warned in time."

The sound of small silver dropped on a tray and the rattle of china teacups drowned the noise of footsteps, but from the bang of a door shut none too carefully, Brent judged that one of the invisible speakers had left the dining room. He was commencing to wonder what had become of the butler and his penciled note to Professor Endicott, which he had given to that worthy upon entering the house. Unable longer to control his nervousness, he sprang up and paced rapidly back and forth. For the fifth time he completed a tour of the room and was about to resume his seat when the portières parted and a girl looked in his direction.

"Barry!" The name slipped involuntarily from her lips as she peered into the semidarkness. "Mr. Langhorne!"

Brent stepped hastily toward her from out of the shadow and as the light from the dining room fell upon his face, she retreated, one hand holding back the portière nearest her, the other upon her heart as if to still its rapid beating.

"I fear I startled you!" he exclaimed. "I am Barry Langhorne's cousin, Fred Brent, and I've come to offer my services to Professor Endicott."

Slowly her tense muscles relaxed and her arms dropped to her sides.

"It is very kind of you," she said, and he was impressed with the soft richness of her low voice. It

must have been she whom he had heard talking in that room a short time before—but who the deuce was she? With uncanny intuition, she answered his unspoken question.

"I am Caroline Endicott," she announced, with quaint dignity which sat well upon her and, observing his mystified expression, her fingers twined themselves around a fold of the simple black gown she was wearing. "You have not heard of me before?"

"Why, eh, eh—" Brent felt his color rise under the steady regard of her large brown eyes and inwardly cursed himself for his sense of awkwardness in her presence. She could not, at best, be over eighteen. Her boyish bob, her tall, slim figure, and the wistful appeal of her small, perfectly shaped mouth, why—her features were faultless! Brent came out of his daze with difficulty. "I—pardon me—I'm completely bowled over by the shocking death of your sister."

"It's horrible," she agreed, and her voice quivered with feeling. "Mary and I were not related, however."

"Oh!" Brent was incapable of more than an ejaculation.

"She was my stepmother's daughter," explained Caroline, then swiftly changed the subject. "Have you seen my father?"

"Not yet; I gave my card to your butler"—with a

quick glance at his watch—"nearly half an hour ago."

"He and I are both—newcomers," raising grave eyes to his. "You must make allowances for Pierre; he speaks but little English and the whole household is upset."

"Naturally." Brent fumbled with his hat and overcoat, which he still carried over his arm. "Is there anything that I can do?"

Caroline's appraising glance swept him from head to foot; again he colored warmly; what was there about this young girl to make him so ill at ease?

"Wait—I will call father." And she was off like an arrow through the swing door leading into the pantry.

Brent tossed his overcoat and hat on a convenient chair, he was tired of holding them, and wandered up and down the room. He was in no mood to cast more than a cursory glance at the rare old silver service on the mahogany sideboard and the collection of priceless Spode in the china cabinets; nor was he conscious of the fine air of repose which the room, with its antique furniture, conveyed; his every thought was claimed by the tragedy enacted at an earlier hour of that same day —beautiful Mary Langhorne stabbed to death. God! it was not possible!

Brent chafed one moist palm over the other. Pshaw! What had come over him to be so nervous? He had seen gruesome enough scenes on the battlefields of

Europe not to be so much affected by a domestic murder. Murder! He shuddered in spite of himself. But was suicide any more agreeable to contemplate? Brent moved over to a window and gazed off down the wooded hillside—the leafless trees were no bleaker than his thoughts.

The room felt suddenly stuffy to him and he opened the French door and walked out on the back porch. Steps led down into the small landscaped garden, but instead of going down them, he stationed himself by the stone parapet. The cooler air cleared his brain and he struggled to shake off his sense of depression. After all there were other things to think about—Caroline Endicott, for instance. Brent shook a bewildered head. He recalled having heard some vague allusions to a Miss Endicott, but he had taken it for granted that she was a sister of the professor—an old maid of an erratic disposition who preferred to linger in Europe rather than reside with her relatives. Strange that his cousin, Barry Langhorne, had not enlightened him as to the girl's existence.

"M'sieur!" Pierre spoke from the doorway. "Will you pleese to come zis way," and taking it for granted that Brent would follow him, the French butler turned back. Without reëntering the living room, Pierre led him through the hall and up the winding staircase. He paused before the closed door and laid his hand on the knob. "Madame vill see you."

But Brent hung back. "I asked for Professor Endicott," he protested. "You've made a mistake."

"Madame vill see you," reiterated Pierre and opened the door. "Monsieur Brent, Madame," he announced, and withdrew.

Across the intervening space, Brent saw a woman seated with bowed head before a flat top desk, placed cat-a-corner by the window of her boudoir. She must have heard Pierre, but it was only when the reporter, with slow reluctance, advanced toward her, that she looked up. She made no attempt to shake hands but stared steadily at him, and Brent, shocked by the alteration in her appearance, stood tongue-tied before her.

Gone was the smiling mask, the beautifully coiffured hair, the pink and white enameled complexion—in their place gray locks, white cheeks and dark, heavy lines, such as only tears of bitter anguish can furrow on the human face.

"What can I say to you, Mrs. Endicott?" he stammered. "Words are pitifully inadequate."

"I have found them so." She touched her eyes with her handkerchief; the motion was purely involuntary—the lids were hot and dry. "Pray be seated, Mr. Brent; pull your chair closer." She waited until he was beside her. "Mary," she pronounced her daughter's name with difficulty, "Mary liked you; she—trusted you."

Brent looked her squarely in the eyes. "We were

good friends," he stated briefly, "and I like to remember it."

A little color appeared in her cheeks, intensifying her pallor as it ebbed rapidly away. "Every one loved Mary," she said, unsteadily. "Every one." Then, with entire change of tone, "Where is Barry?"

For the first time Brent looked away. "I thought to find him here," he replied.

"And yet you asked to see my husband?" She was watching him with disconcerting intentness, while fingering his visiting card lying on the table. "You did not inquire for your cousin although you 'thought him here'?" mimicking his voice.

Brent cleared his throat. "I feared to intrude—his wife's frightful death," he mumbled. There was an uncomfortable silence, which Mrs. Endicott broke.

"I cannot understand what Mary saw in him," she declared passionately. "A man years her senior; cold—calculating"—with vicious emphasis on the last word.

"It was a love match." Brent was not looking at Mrs. Endicott, his gaze roving about the boudoir; dainty in its furnishings it gave sure indication of the cultivated taste of its owner.

Mrs. Endicott did not reply at once; she was busily occupied in covertly studying her companion. Brent was far from handsome, but there was something likable about his large, humorous mouth and merry gray eyes under their heavy eyebrows. His brown hair, in-

clined to curl at the ends, was decidedly rumpled, as he had never cured himself of the habit of running his fingers over his head when worried or excited. Brent tucked his long legs under his chair with a subdued sigh; he heartily wished the interview over.

"You acted as best man at that mad marriage on Friday, Mr. Brent"—he actually jumped at the shrillness of her voice. "Did you notice anything peculiar about Mary?"

Brent thought a second, then shook his head. "We were excited, Barry and I, but Mary was very quiet."

"How was she dressed?"

"Oh, in something dark"—vaguely—"very becoming, however."

"She wore black—a peculiar color for a bride to select, Mr. Brent, even for a runaway marriage." Mrs. Endicott rose swiftly to her feet, accepting his proffered arm as he sprang up, and crossed the boudoir. She stopped by the chaise longue and pointed to a black georgette crêpe gown which was spread along the piece of furniture.

"They brought my baby home to me in that." The scalding tears fell one by one as she laid a shaking finger on the blood-stained crêpe. "This was her wedding gown."

CHAPTER III

THE DEATH CAR

A STEP behind them caused Mrs. Endicott to turn around with a violent start. At sight of her husband, she strove to regain some hold upon her composure. That Professor Endicott and his wife were devoted to each other had often been commented upon by their numerous friends; in speaking of them and Mrs. Endicott's daughter, Mary Wagstaff, one of their admirers had said, "Two are always in a conspiracy for the happiness of the third," and the apt remark had circled Washington drawing-rooms until finally it reached the professor's ears.

"My dear,"—Endicott slipped his arm about his wife and led her back to her chair. "Dr. McLane said that you were to remain in bed. I am sure that Brent will excuse you."

"Oh, certainly, Mrs. Endicott." Brent looked as uncomfortable as he felt; he took a hesitating step toward the door leading into the hall, then paused. "I came to ask if there is anything I can do for you and Mrs. Endicott, Professor?"

Neither of his companions spoke for an instant, then Mrs. Endicott sank back in her seat and covered her eyes with her hand.

"There is nothing—yes—stay," and Brent paused with his hand on the door knob. "Let me know immediately if you have word of Barry Langhorne's whereabouts."

"I will," and Brent, with a pitying glance at the grief-stricken mother, bowed profoundly to the professor and hurried away. He had almost reached the staircase when he heard his name softly called and, facing about, found Professor Endicott walking toward him.

"If you have a second to spare, Brent," he began on reaching his side, "I wish you would go with me to interview Detective Barlow."

"Certainly, sir," and Brent suited his long stride to the professor's halting gait. Slowly the latter limped down the staircase, his club foot dragging more than usual. He and Brent were on the bottom step when a door leading to the back hall opened, and a woman hurried toward them. The professor welcomed her appearance with an exclamation of relief.

"I am glad you are back so soon, Miss Holt," he said cordially. "I hope you can induce my wife to carry out the doctor's orders. Try and get her to lie down."

"Is she out of bed?" The nurse's deep, contralto voice was carefully lowered; she shifted the packages she was carrying from one hand to the other as Brent stepped aside to permit her to pass him on the stair-

case. A bob of her head acknowledged his courtesy. "Mrs. Endicott insisted that I do these errands for her—"

"Quite right," agreed the professor; "it is best to humor her." A dreary sigh cut short his words and he crossed the broad hall to the coat closet. Brent was about to follow when he was checked by an ejaculation and looking back, saw Miss Holt retracing her steps.

"Would you mind posting this letter?" she asked, pausing just above him. "I carried it into town and forgot to mail it."

As Brent reached for the letter tucked between the packages, he glanced up into the nurse's face and was struck by her wholesome, homely appearance. Whatever claim to good looks Miss Holt might have had were marred, or so he judged, by the heavy, dark-rimmed horn spectacles and their thick lenses. With a brief word of thanks she continued up the staircase and Brent turned around to find Pierre standing patiently at his elbow, holding his hat and overcoat.

Once outside the house, Professor Endicott did not, as Brent had expected, go toward the sidewalk; instead he led the way along the circular path which skirted his home. In silence the two men trudged through the terraced garden and, leaving the asphalt walk, continued on their way down the hillside. As they struck more uneven ground, the professor shifted his

walking stick to his left hand and leaned heavily on Brent's supporting arm. They had covered fully a quarter of a mile when the younger man's quick ear detected the sound of snapping twigs to their left; twice he glanced through the trees in that direction, then concluded that his companion's heavy tread among the dead leaves and underbrush was responsible for the noise. Again came the sound, louder this time, and Brent halted abruptly; certainly some one was keeping pace with them! The next second a handsome Airedale terrier was leaping and bounding about the two men.

"Down, Zeto!" And at the command in a clear, girlish voice, the dog crouched at Professor Endicott's feet, nose pointed between his paws. He kept that position even after Caroline Endicott joined the little group.

"Go home!" The professor spoke peremptorily, but Brent could not tell which he was addressing, the girl or the dog; neither stirred. Endicott released his hold on the reporter's arm and grasped his cane more firmly—the action was not lost on his daughter.

"Don't, Dad!" she exclaimed. "Zeto has never been struck."

"Then call him away; I don't like him sniffing at my feet," grumbled Endicott. "And what are you doing here?" with a stern, forbidding look, not lost on Brent. "Why didn't you stay with Nurse Nana?"

"I have outgrown nurses." Caroline's brilliant color might have come from the wind sweeping through the tree tops but Brent thought otherwise. It most certainly matched the angry sparkle in her brown eyes. "I've come here to be with you, Dad, and"—with a sidelong glance at the younger man,—"Mr. Brent, is it not?"

Professor Endicott leaned on his cane and stared curiously at his companions. "So you two have met before," he said, and Brent wondered at the peculiar inflection in his voice. "Well, Brent, suppose you escort Caroline home and then join me on Normanstone Drive. Take your dog with you, Caroline."

The dog, at a word from her, moved, but not the girl.

"Detective Barlow sent word he wanted me," she explained, "and I'll feel more comfortable, Dad, if I'm with you; take care, you'll fall!" as her father stepped backward and in so doing tripped over the exposed roots of a tree. He accepted Brent's steadying hand with a word of thanks and without further comment went slowly down the hill toward a macadam road which crossed the ravine a quarter of a mile beyond.

Caroline appeared not inclined for conversation and Brent accompanied father and daughter in puzzled silence, his gaze roving between the girl, walking just in front of them with light, easy tread, and the gray-

haired, careworn professor, leaning heavily on his arm, his club foot dragging pitifully at times.

Overcoming physical infirmities, Charles Endicott had worked his way through college and through many vicissitudes during a long and varied career in his chosen profession. His archæological work had taken him into many lands and different climes, and in later years had brought him fame; fortune he had acquired by marrying the wealthy widow, Martha Wagstaff. Two years before he had retired from professional life and had settled in the National Capital, there to introduce to Washington society his stepdaughter, pretty Mary Wagstaff. But no hint of his having a daughter of his own by a former marriage had preceded Caroline Endicott's arrival, that fact Fred Brent was ready to swear to, and his mystification grew as he watched his companions. There was only a faint family resemblance between father and daughter, evidently she had inherited her vivid coloring and dark hair from her mother, but both she and Endicott had an indefinable air of breeding which, for want of a better word, is sometimes called the "hallmark" of gentle birth.

Usually in that subdivision known as Massachusetts Park and a natural beauty spot of Washington, with handsome houses built at considerable distance from each other in the thickly wooded section, its winding paths and macadam roads were comparatively free from traffic, but as Professor Endicott, Caroline and Brent

crossed Woodland Drive and continued up Normanstone Drive, they found themselves obliged to walk in the gutter to avoid being hit by the automobiles filing slowly along; however, motor-cycle policemen, stationed at street intersections, would not let the chauffeurs loiter in the neighborhood of a parked taxicab well to one side of the road, which claimed their morbid curiosity.

A small man, in nondescript clothing, standing somewhat back of one of the policemen, was the first to spot Professor Endicott and he beckoned to him to approach the taxicab.

"Very inconsiderate, Barlow, to drag me down here," began Endicott, making no attempt to hide his displeasure. "And I fail to see why you wished my daughter, also."

Detective Barlow bowed deferentially to Caroline, while bestowing an inquiring glance at Brent.

"Sorry, sir, that you walked," he said, his manner conciliatory. "I presumed you would both drive here. You are," with a swift glance at the motor cars still going by, "about the only people in Washington who haven't driven this way. Your stepdaughter's suicide has made a big stir."

Brent felt the professor's hand, still resting on his arm, contract sharply and the nicotine-stained finger nails scraped along his coat sleeve. The older man drew a step nearer the taxicab.

"Suicide—bah!" he ejaculated roughly. "Happy people don't commit suicide, Barlow."

"Then Mrs. Langhorne was happy—"

"Certainly she was. The theory of suicide is preposterous," stormed Endicott. "If you waste valuable time thinking that, the murderer will escape."

"Not if you give me a line on who he is," retorted Barlow swiftly. "Come, sir, who killed her?"

"The taxi driver"—simply. Endicott's momentary excitement had cooled apparently and he paused to look around at the landscape. "An ideal place for a crime," he commented. "A lonely road skirted by woods—what's that moving over there?" pointing to a gray shadow among the trees.

"Zeto!" Caroline's shrill whistle brought the Airedale to her side. She peered over her father's shoulder at the taxi with wide, curious eyes. "How did Mary ever come to trust herself in such a dilapidated car?" she asked. "Surely, it's—"

"What we call a 'night-hawk,' Miss Endicott; the kind that prowl the streets at night looking for a fare." The detective drew his fingers up and down his clean shaven chin and regarded the young girl speculatively. "Mrs. Endicott sent me word that you and Mrs. Langhorne went to the theater together last night; so I guess you can answer your own question."

"But I can't," quickly. "You see, Mary left the theater before I did."

Professor Endicott actually jumped. "What!" he roared, regardless that his voice carried to the plain clothes policemen standing near by. "What utter nonsense! Mary would never have left you alone at that hour of the night in a city strange to you."

"But she did," declared Caroline, with warmth. "We were at the Metropolitan and I wanted to stay on and see the first of the picture, so I remained for the last show and Mary went out to take a cab home."

Endicott bent forward and regarded his daughter incredulously. "Do you mean to assert that you and Mary came home separately?" he asked.

"Yes"; meeting his stare unwaveringly. "How else did Mary get in this taxi?"

A gray pallor overspread the professor's usually ruddy cheeks. "I"—he began confusedly; then turned furiously on Fred Brent. "Well, sir, what are you grimacing about?"

Completely taken a-back, young Brent stared at his questioner, his color rising hotly. "W-w-h-y, I—I—wasn't," he stammered, conscious that he was suddenly the center of attention. "Good gracious, I wasn't doing anything!"

"No?" The professor's dry tone brought a further feeling of discomfort, which grew as Brent encountered the detective's penetrating glance. "Mr. Brent, Barlow, is a cousin of Senator Langhorne."

"Ah, indeed, is that so." The detective ducked his

head courteously in acknowledgment of the casual introduction. "A cousin of Senator Langhorne," he repeated; "the eccentric husband of the dead woman." Barlow saw Endicott wince as his eyes swept his small audience, missing nothing in their keen scrutiny. "We've gotten in touch with him."

"How? Where?" broke in the professor, but his questions went unheeded.

Detective Barlow had an eye for beauty, and no man ever found one look at Caroline Endicott completely satisfying—her charm was too elusive for that. To the detective she typified his ideal of young girlhood, and he stared at her openly and with undisguised interest. She had retreated from the little group and stood just within earshot between two oak trees, a hand resting against the nearest one. From the entwining branches overhead dangled a number of old ropes which evidently had been used by boys in the neighborhood for a trapeze. As the gusts of wind grew stronger a coil of rope, dislodged from its precarious resting place, slipped downward and found lodgment around Caroline's throat.

"Take care," warned the detective, going to her assistance. "It's somewhat dangerous, Miss Endicott, to run your head in a noose."

Caroline's wintry smile thanked him as he drew aside the rope.

"So curious a car," she murmured, again approach-

ing the parked taxi. "It looks like a modernized family ark."

Her criticism was justified. Evidently the car was shortly destined for the scrap heap; however, even with fenders bent and broken, with heavy dents here and there in the body, and unpainted for many a long day, it still showed the fine workmanship which had gone into its making originally.

"An old Cadillac," announced Barlow, following Caroline's movements with interest and ignoring the professor and Brent as they also came closer. "Page didn't do much for the exterior of his car, but the engine's in prime condition; he must be a tip-top mechanic. Look inside, Miss Endicott—isn't it roomy?"

Obediently Caroline poked her head in the door as Barlow kept up his running comments.

"It's a seven-passenger limousine." He raised his hand to prevent her entering the car. "See, Miss Endicott, the doorway's extra wide, and there's lots of space, with the two folding seats closed, between the front partition and the big back seat. We found Mrs. Langhorne's body lying back in the corner as if she had been sitting there comfortably for hours."

In spite of her warm coat, Caroline felt a shiver creep down her spine; she wished that the detective would cease talking; his rather nasal voice grated on her ears.

"Why are the blinds pulled down on all the windows?" she asked, balancing herself on the running-board, as she turned slightly to put the question.

"Don't know, Miss Endicott; that's the way we found 'em." Barlow leaned inside the door and switched on the electric torch he had taken out of his pocket a second before. "Notice the upholstery? It's in first-class condition."

"It seems so," agreed Caroline. Her glance swept the interior of the car, taking in every detail with lightning appraisement. "But there's no carpet on the floor."

Detective Barlow looked up at her admiringly. "The carpet's the one part of the car that's missing, Miss Endicott," he acknowledged, and his manner was grave. "And the taxi driver, Page, claims it was there last night, along with his male passenger, who also disappeared."

In the silence that ensued Barlow stepped back, pocketed his torch and rubbed his hands together, as he looked at his white-faced companions. "Quite a pretty little problem for us to solve, eh, what?"

And each answering "yes" varied in intonation.

CHAPTER IV

A PUZZLING MAZE

THE patter of rain on the roof of the sun parlor grew more pronounced in the silence which prevailed and Professor Endicott cast a glance tingled with impatience at Detective Barlow placidly leaning back in a comfortable wing chair, puffing at his pipe. The detective's small, insignificant features were somewhat obscured by the tobacco smoke which hovered about his head until dissipated now and then by a wave of his hand. Barlow loved his pipe and to while away the tedium of waiting in such surroundings was a pleasanter task than usually fell to the lot of one of the hardest working of the Central Office operatives of the Metropolitan Police Force.

"Another wretched night." Endicott bit viciously at the end of a fresh cigar, preparatory to lighting it. "What did the telegram say?"

It was at least the fiftieth time the same question had been put to him, but Barlow good-naturedly ignored that fact. Taking the yellow telegraph blank once more from his vest pocket, he spread it out on his knee.

" 'Be at Professor Endicott's home to-night. Lang-

horne,'" he read aloud. "Well, Professor, what do you make of it this time?"

"What I did at first," retorted the other. "Langhorne doesn't say *he'll* be here, but directs you to come here. Why?"

"We'll know in time." Barlow refused to share Endicott's excited irritability, and refilled his pipe with deliberation. "When were your stepdaughter and Senator Langhorne married?"

"Ten days ago," shortly; "to be exact, on Friday, March 13th."

"And where did they spend their honeymoon?" persisted Barlow.

"In Philadelphia. Langhorne," with a snap of his silver match box cover, "had to leave unexpectedly for the West to attend to some pressing business, and Mary, never a good traveler, decided to stay with us until his return. She reached here Saturday and this is Tuesday—"

"Four days ago," mused Barlow. "And you have heard nothing from Senator Langhorne since the wedding?—haven't seen him since then?"

The extension telephone, on a small table at Endicott's elbow, rang with maddening persistency even after the professor had removed the receiver. His language, on discovering an inquiring reporter at the other end of the line, was more picturesque than his customary excellent English. During the interchange of re-

marks, Barlow scanned the room with undisguised interest; the sun parlor, just outside the living room, was fitted up as a den, or small library, low, built-in bookshelves running under the many windows, soft-shaded reading lamps, Oriental rugs and cretonne-covered wicker furniture, the latter matching in color the silk window curtains, made a most attractive place in which to lounge and smoke, as well as read.

"One is never free from impertinence, apparently," declared Endicott, his face an angry red, as he sat back in his chair after replacing the telephone instrument. "I have refused to be interviewed or to permit any member of my household to be annoyed by intrusive reporters." He touched a button and Pierre responded at once. "Ask my daughter to come here, Pierre. Where is that beastly dog?"

"She haf gone out wiz him, m'sieur—"

"What! In the rain!" And Endicott half started from his chair.

"Oui, m'sieur, but only to ze garage; she would not allow me to take ze suppaire to ze dog."

The professor frowned and dismissed the butler with a wave of his hand. His cane, lying across his knees, was a convenient plaything for his restless fingers, while the tobacco smoke, again hovering over the detective's head, proved an effective screen for Barlow's facial expression as he puffed contentedly at his pipe and waited for his host to address him.

Upon leaving the sun parlor, Pierre started on his mission to find the professor's daughter, but a spell of coughing sent him to the pantry for a drink of water, diluted with something stronger, and Caroline Endicott, coming along the back hall, missed seeing him by a fraction of a second. Not troubling to go to the front of the house, she used the servants' staircase to reach her bedroom. Once inside it, with the door tightly closed, she lost no time in hanging up her wet coat and while in the closet removed the slippers she was wearing for a pair of dry ones. She was about to place them on the shoe rack when she noticed that only one gray suède slipper was reposing there. She looked in perplexity at the black buckskin pumps, with their silver buckles, which she had just taken off, and at the black satin slippers she had donned in their place and then back at the shoe rack—where was the mate to the gray suède slipper? Perhaps Nurse Nana had taken it away to clean; ah, that was it, and yet, why take only one?

Caroline walked over to her bureau, her brow wrinkled in thought; pshaw, why worry over the matter, and dismissing it from her mind she paused to regard herself in the mirror. It was a very winsome face that looked back at her, in spite of the unaccustomed shadows under the long, silky lashes, and paler cheeks than customary. Her passage across the ocean had not taken the curl from her permanent wave and it took but a

second or two to arrange her bobbed hair to her liking, then turning she looked about her bedroom. It was comfortable, as far as creature comfort was concerned, but, oh, there was no atmosphere of home.

Caroline drew her fingers across her eyelids; they were wet with tears as, all unbidden, her thoughts flew back to the quaint English village and the fine old manor where she had spent her infancy and girlhood with her mother's brother. Her uncle and aunt had been so good to her, so devoted in their care and then had come the hour of parting—and for what—to find a none too cordial welcome in this land across the seas.

She had spent less than a week in her father's house, no, rather her stepmother's residence; long long days. A wry smile crossed her lips as she went over to a chiffonier and rearranged, more to her liking, a number of photographs. Nurse Nana's artistic taste could not altogether be relied upon, but then her old nurse, under whose watchful care she had made the trip from England, had taken the pictures from her steamer trunk only with a view to making the bedroom less formal in appearance. But the sight of her uncle and aunt smiling at her from their pictured likenesses brought such a wave of homesickness with it, that Caroline fled abruptly from the room; any one's society was better than her own.

The house, recently completed, was large and rambling, with bedrooms arranged in suites, and as Caro-

line walked down one of the wide halls she instinctively stepped more softly on passing the rooms which had been occupied by Mary Langhorne, and now held all that was mortal of the young bride. The hall door was ajar and a long-drawn sigh reached Caroline's quick ears; without pausing to reflect she pushed the door further open and glanced inside the room. In the subdued light from shaded lamps she saw a tall figure gazing down at the dead woman on the undertaker's couch and the look of horror and poignant grief on the man's face stilled the words upon her lips. He neither saw nor heard the young girl poised uncertainly in the doorway. Suddenly he dropped to his knees and laid his cheek against the hand crossed upon Mary Langhorne's breast, and then Caroline slipped silently away, closing the door behind her.

"Ah, Mam'selle." Pierre caught up with her in the large, formal drawing-room, where she was wandering aimlessly up and down, striving to conquer her unaccustomed nervousness by examining the many priceless pieces of bric-à-brac in cabinets and on tables. "Please go to your fazzer in ze sun parlor; he want to speak wiz you," and the butler held back the portières in front of the entrance into the hall.

It took Caroline but a second or two to cross the house to the sun parlor, but at sight of Detective Barlow she hesitated, then conquering her evident reluctance, she approached her father.

"What is it, Dad?" she asked, stopping by his side.

Endicott peered up at her, and the black eyes, under his beetling brows, held an unfathomable look.

"Sit down," he said, as the detective brought forward a chair, and his voice held almost a caressing note. "You appear very tired, my child," taking her hand and patting it clumsily. "The servants can look after the dog; don't go out again in the wet."

"Zeto isn't fond of strangers." She glanced at the detective, who stood regarding her kindly, and back again at her father. "With your permission, I'll keep him in my room hereafter."

Endicott frowned and his fingers, grasping her hand, loosened their hold.

"Zeto is much too large for a house dog," he protested. "Sell him, and I'll get you a Pom."

"Sell Zeto—never!" Caroline was on her feet again and half way to the door, but her father's voice checked her abrupt exit.

"Caroline, Caroline," he chided gently. "Don't be so impetuous. Come back, my child," and he put out his hand with a half-pleading, wholly affectionate gesture. "I need you."

Slowly Caroline retraced her footsteps, but she did not sit down in the chair she had just vacated; instead she chose one somewhat in shadow.

"Pierre said you wished to see me, Dad," she re-

minded him, as the minutes passed with neither man addressing her.

Detective Barlow cleared his throat. "I have a few questions I'd like answered," he began; "and there are some points your father doesn't seem to be very clear on," with an apologetic cough as the professor muttered something under his breath; "for instance, at what hour did you get home from the theater last night?"

"About eleven o'clock," promptly; "that is, I think so—the hall clock chimed that hour just as I reached my bedroom, I remember."

"Did you meet any member of the household on your way to your room?"

"No." Caroline paused and considered the detective a second before adding, "I thought of stopping to see Mary, but on passing her room I found it in darkness and concluded she was asleep."

"How could you tell her room was dark?" quickly.

"The hall door was slightly ajar."

Professor Endicott twisted around in his chair and faced her.

"And how did you get in the house at that hour of the night without ringing the front door bell?" he inquired; his fingers had deserted the cane he had been playing with and were fiddling with his watch fob.

"Mary had loaned me her latchkey yesterday morning and I forgot to give it back to her when she left me in the theater," explained Caroline. She wished

most heartily her father would sit still; his restless fingering of every object within reach increased her nervousness. "I used the key so as not to disturb any one."

"Evidently your entry was noiseless," commented Endicott dryly. "I am a light sleeper, and I don't believe I closed my eyes until around five o'clock this morning, Barlow."

"Indeed, sir?" Unobtrusively the detective was watching them closely, puzzled by the air of constraint between father and daughter. "And how did you first learn of your stepdaughter's death?"

"Through the police," curtly. Endicott glanced at his watch. "Humph! ten o'clock and Langhorne isn't here—that telegram's a fake, Barlow." A faint note of triumph, or so it seemed to Caroline, in her father's voice caused her to glance at him sharply, but his stern, compressed lips and frowning brows conveyed far different feelings apparently.

"You may be right," admitted the detective. "The telegram is ambiguous. It's curious, very, that Senator Langhorne doesn't show up."

"He is here now," broke in Caroline, and Professor Endicott wheeled upon her with such suddenness that she actually jumped.

"Where?" he demanded.

"Upstairs in Mary's room."

Endicott half rose, then dropped heavily back in his

chair, his hands gripping the arms with a force that made the veins stand out, just as the door leading into the living room opened more fully and Senator Langhorne came toward him. For a moment the two men faced each other without speaking, and Barlow, getting slowly to his feet, remained equally silent.

"You've come—at last!" The words were almost whispered, and the professor, his lips twitching strangely, made an effort to rise, checked immediately, however, by Langhorne's hand pressing upon his shoulder.

"Don't—I'll sit here by you." In turning to the other chair, Langhorne caught sight of Barlow and nodded to him. "The butler said you were here, Mr. Barlow; I'm glad you waited;" then addressing Endicott, "Why did you not notify me immediately of Mary's"—his voice faltered—"Mary's horrible death?"

"Because I hadn't your address—neither Mrs. Endicott nor I knew where you had gone."

"Didn't Mary tell you?"

"No." The professor had resumed playing with his cane. "To be quite candid," with brutal frankness, "since her return from her honeymoon your wife never mentioned your name."

Langhorne was looking down and none in the room could gauge his expression; suddenly he glanced up and about the sun parlor and for the first time became aware of Caroline Endicott's presence. There was an

instant's pause, then Langhorne bent forward in his chair and looked more intently at her.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Is the young lady going to faint?"

Endicott jerked himself about. "Hey, what!" noticing his daughter's pallor in alarm as Barlow switched on another electric lamp so that its rays fell directly upon her. "Here, get a glass of water!"

But Langhorne had already filled a tumbler from the water pitcher on the table by Endicott's side and pressed it to Caroline's lips.

"Feeling better?" he asked solicitously, noting with relief the return of color to her cheeks.

"Yes, thanks," Caroline crimsoned with mortification. "I'm ashamed of myself; it's nothing, Dad, really."

"You had better go to bed," broke in Endicott, then, encountering Langhorne's bewildered stare, "This is my daughter, Langhorne, Caroline Endicott. Come, child, run along."

But Caroline kept her seat. "I'll not disturb you again," she said, "and I think," with a quick, challenging glance at the detective, "Mr. Barlow wishes me here."

Had she caught her father's eyes she might have quailed before his blazing anger, but almost instantly he controlled his emotion, and, ignoring her completely, turned again to Senator Langhorne.

"Are you utterly heartless?" he asked. "Could you not have telegraphed some message of sympathy to Mary's mother—you must know their devotion to each other."

Langhorne bowed. "I would have done so had there been time," he explained. "After getting Barlow's message relayed to me, I wired him— You got it?"

"Yes." Barlow spread the telegram in front of him. "This was sent from Pittsburgh four hours ago," he looked gravely across at Langhorne. "No train could have got you here from Pittsburgh in that time."

"I came by airplane." Langhorne resumed his seat by the table and almost touching Endicott. "I saw by the latest press dispatch that the police have arrested the murderer."

"Who is that?" and Barlow came closer, bringing his chair with him.

"The taxi driver."

Barlow tipped back in his chair and, thrusting his hands in his pockets, studied the man across from him. He had seen a number of crude newspaper cuts of the junior senator from Maryland, but never met him face to face before. Langhorne's hair was dark and shot with silver, his eyes, soft, large and deep blue, and the fingers which supported his head, as he sat with elbow resting on the table, were tapering and white—a long nervous hand, but one unmistakably belonging to a man of gentle birth and tender rearing.

"He didn't kill your wife, Senator"—and at the words Langhorne sat bolt upright, a look of dawning horror upon his countenance. "Why, sir, reason it out yourself; no man would deliberately kill a woman in his car and then ten minutes later climb back in the driver's seat and go placidly to sleep."

"He was drunk," Endicott pointed out; but again Barlow shook his head.

"I'm not so sure; besides, there's the motive—"

"Robbery," suggested Langhorne; turning his head he looked over Endicott's shoulder at Caroline and wondered at the persistence of her stare.

"Page was searched and no valuables or money, except for a handful of change, were found on his person or in his car." Barlow paused before adding, "Mrs. Endicott declares neither money nor jewelry belonging to your wife has been stolen."

Langhorne sat so still that Barlow was commencing to wonder if he had heard his last remark when the latter addressed the professor.

"Can I see Mrs. Endicott?" he asked.

"Not to-night." With an effort Endicott arose; he was stiff from keeping in one position for so long. "Your room is prepared for you, Barry; come upstairs with me. Barlow," halting at the door, "be here to-morrow at eleven. Caroline, don't stay up any longer."

But it was only when Pierre came into the sun parlor to put out the lights and see that the windows

were locked that Caroline Endicott followed her father's injunction.

Once inside her bedroom, with the door safely bolted, she stopped before the long pier glass; to see herself in it was at least to view something human. Suddenly her overcharged feelings found relief in addressing her reflection.

"So that is Barry Langhorne," she muttered. "Then, in God's name, who is the man I saw a while back in Mary's room?"

CHAPTER V

THE IMPORTANCE OF TIME

THE French butler took the breakfast tray from Miss Holt with a hurried: "Pardon, Mam'-selle; I ver' sorry not to come for it, but zat bell, she ring all ze time."

"It is quite all right, Pierre." Miss Holt paused to adjust her nurse's cap, which had assumed a somewhat rakish angle when she hurried downstairs with the tray. "I realize you are kept busy. Can I have a drink of water?" and she waited while Pierre hastened to the ice-box, to return a moment later with both pitcher and glass. The drink proved most refreshing and she had her glass refilled; this, her thirst slightly quenched, she sipped more slowly as she moved over to the large china closet which lined one wall of the pantry and examined its contents. "What exquisite china and glass, Pierre," involuntarily giving vent to her admiration. "Mrs. Endicott has many superb sets of plates."

Pierre beamed. "Her dinnaire table look ver' fine when we give parties, Mam'selle; but her gold service, it is locked away." He came close to the nurse and lowered his voice. "How is Madame?"

"Better, this morning." Miss Holt put her empty glass on the porcelain topped table. "Is Professor Endicott still in the dining room?"

The butler shook his head. "He haf gone; zat man, ze detectif"—he put his hand to his temple, "oh, oui, M'sieur Bartlett, no, zat not right,—Barlow"—and he nodded, well pleased with himself at recollecting the correct name. "He telephone he come out here an' M'sieur jus' push away ze breakfast, call for his car an' go. Haf you see M'sieur Langhorne?" As he spoke Pierre pretended to be engrossed in his task of polishing silver, but out of the tail of his eye he was keeping a close watch on the trained nurse. If the question surprised Miss Holt, she gave no evidence of it in either expression or voice.

"I only came on duty three hours ago," she replied, laying her hand on the swing door to the dining room. "And Senator Langhorne has not seen Mrs. Endicott this morning."

Pierre nodded his head thoughtfully. "Nor las' night;" he spoke half to himself. "I work for hees mothaire two, no, tree years ago; they ver' nice people, mam'selle, an'," his bright, black eyes stared up into her be-spectacled face; "M'sieur Langhorne knew me las' night; he had not forgotten."

Miss Holt smiled kindly at the little Frenchman. "Of course he hadn't," she agreed. "Now, Pierre, be sure and remind the cook to have Mrs. Endicott's broth

ready at noon," and not waiting to hear his answer, she went into the dining room. She was about to continue on her way upstairs when she saw the parlor maid ushering Detective Barlow into the living room. Miss Holt lingered where she was until the parlor maid, oblivious of her presence, had gone about her work on the second floor, then she sought the detective.

Barlow looked up from the paper he was reading at the sound of her approach, and his expression of doubt changed to one of delight as she came up to him.

"Miss Holt, is it really you!" he exclaimed; his eyes swept over her immaculate white uniform. "You are here on a case?"

"Yes, taking care of Mrs. Endicott." She returned the warm pressure of his hand with a clasp equally firm. "It is nearly a year since I have seen you, Mr. Barlow."

"True enough, and what luck to have you here," declared Barlow, dropping his voice to almost a whisper. "I've never forgotten the assistance you gave me in solving the Webb case. Will you help me now?"

She looked at him closely. "Do you really need my aid?"

"I should say I did," with hearty emphasis. "The death of young Mrs. Langhorne is decidedly baffling and, to be frank, there are certain phases I fail to understand just now. Come, Miss Holt, let's be partners again in clearing up this mystery."

She wavered. "It isn't ethical—"

"Listen, Miss Holt." He spoke earnestly, convincingly. "A dastardly crime has been committed against a defenseless woman; oh, I'm convinced of it," as she started to interrupt him. "It is your duty, as a law-abiding citizen, to assist the police in locating the criminal and clearing the innocent from suspicion," and, observing she still hesitated, "remember your part will never be known unless you wish it spoken of."

She considered him for a moment in silence. "How long will you be here?"

"Until Professor Endicott returns," with a shrug of his shoulders and a faint twinkle in his deep-set eyes; "which I judge won't be for some time; I suspect he is trying to avoid me, in spite of having suggested last night that I come here this morning."

She was silent for a second or two, then coming to a quick decision, looked up at him. "I'll see you later; just now I must return to Mrs. Endicott."

"Good!" He had followed her to the door and from that position watched her run lightly up the staircase, then with a chuckle of pure delight he resumed the perusal of the morning paper; Miss Holt was an ally for whom he entertained whole-hearted respect and liking.

Up in the sick room the trained nurse went about her duties with methodical precision and thoroughness.

With deft skill she rearranged Mrs. Endicott's pillows and gave her a cooling drink.

"Miss Holt!" At the peremptory pronouncement of her name, she put the empty glass on the nearest table and again approached the bed. "Why is it you have not brought me the morning paper?"

"I haven't been able to find it, Mrs. Endicott," tucking the bed clothes more closely around her patient. "The maid said your husband was reading the *Post* at breakfast and I presume he took it with him when he went out just now."

Mrs. Endicott passed one feverish hand over the other. "Dear, dear," she exclaimed. "Charles promised to bring it to me; it isn't like him to forget; heretofore my slightest wish has been his law." Her eyes, red and swollen from weeping, were lifted pleadingly to the nurse. "My arm hurts."

"You must keep it covered and on the electric pad," cautioned Miss Holt. "Heat is the best treatment for neuritis. You must follow the doctor's directions or we can do nothing for you."

A dreary sigh was Mrs. Endicott's only response. "I cannot understand why I feel so much worse," she complained, after a moment's silence. "And now when I need all my strength; oh, it isn't fair, it isn't just!" and she wrung her hands, thereby dislodging the bed clothes which Miss Holt had carefully tucked over her right shoulder.

Miss Holt's firm touch for the moment checked the older woman's inclination to hysterics, then with a motherly admonition to lie down again on the pillows, she crossed over to the bathroom and returned within a few minutes, glass in hand.

"Drink this," she coaxed; "it is just a mild sedative," and she smiled encouragingly as she persuaded Mrs. Endicott most unwillingly to swallow the medicine. With untiring patience she again made her comfortable in bed and sat by her in sympathetic silence as Mrs. Eendicott, with fresh tears, talked on and on, recalling long-forgotten incidents of her daughter's infancy.

"Mary was such a pretty baby," she repeated; "and later so popular at boarding school; then we brought her here for her début in society and she was the center of attention."

"Had Mrs. Langhorne many love affairs?" asked Miss Holt, as Mrs. Endicott paused to take breath.

A shade passed over the latter's face. "Men fell in love with Mary; there was Baron Thier, of Belgium, Captain Slocum, Teddy Burns, Mr.— oh, many others," pulling herself up short. "But Mary never took any of them seriously—"

"Until she met Senator Langhorne?"

Apparently Miss Holt's words fell on deaf ears for Mrs. Endicott, resting among her pillows, of which she had three at her back, closed her eyes and lay quiet for

a time. Fully twenty minutes passed and Miss Holt was about to tiptoe from the room when Mrs. Endicott looked up drowsily.

"Try and find a copy of the *Post* for me," she suggested. "Pierre or the chauffeur may have one." She pressed her hand against her forehead, then let it drop listlessly on the counterpane. "I'm so sleepy—at last."

But Miss Holt did not at once carry out Mrs. Endicott's wishes, remaining instead by her bedside until fully convinced from her regular breathing that her patient was sleeping quietly. It took her but a short time to complete straightening the room, and, with one more solicitous look at Mrs. Endicott to see that she was entirely comfortable, the trained nurse sought the sun parlor.

"I could not come sooner," she explained, taking the seat Barlow pushed forward. "And I can stay but a few minutes; Mrs. Endicott should not be left alone long."

"Is she worse?"

"No, but she is in a highly hysterical condition, both from physical pain and the shock of her daughter's death." Miss Holt spoke with more than usual rapidity. "She is a bundle of nerves anyway."

"From my one interview I would have said nerves were the last complaint Mrs. Endicott suffers from." Barlow drew up a chair close to her side. "She was

remarkably composed. Have you known her long?"

"This is the second time I have taken care of her; if she has a pin prick she sends for a nurse." Miss Holt looked about the pleasant sun-lit room and a touch of envy crept into her voice. "Fortunately the Endicotts can afford to gratify their whims."

"It is said that Mrs. Endicott is very wealthy." A fit of coughing interrupted Barlow and it was some seconds before he could proceed. "Were you up with Mrs. Endicott on Monday night?"

Miss Holt shook her head. "I am on what is termed twenty-four hour duty; that is, I sleep on a cot in my patient's room and am on call if she needs me."

"And how about Monday?" prompted Barlow as she hesitated.

"Mrs. Endicott was very restless early that evening but she dropped off to sleep about midnight," went on Miss Holt. "I then lay down on my cot and slept until five o'clock, when Mrs. Endicott called me."

"Had any noise awakened her; any unusual noise. I mean?" asked the detective quickly.

"She didn't say so." Miss Holt paused in thought. "She was having a chill; she said she had thrown off her bedclothes in her sleep."

"Ah!" The detective's interest quickened. "But she might have gotten equally chilled by walking about. Could Mrs. Endicott have arisen and left the room without your knowing it?"

"Hardly!" Miss Holt's professional pride was touched. "I'm not that kind of a nurse."

"I didn't mean anything derogatory," protested Barlow, anxious to appease. "But nurses get tired like every one else, and I imagine Mrs. Endicott required a lot of waiting on before you got a chance to lie down."

"True; but I would have still heard my patient had she made the slightest move to get out of bed," declared Miss Holt, with convincing emphasis. "My training and experience have taught me to sleep with one eye and both ears open."

"And you heard nothing unusual on Monday night?"

"No," briefly. "Professor Endicott bade his wife good-night about nine o'clock; then the house quieted down and no one came near us until the next morning."

"Did you hear Miss Caroline Endicott enter the house around eleven o'clock and go to her room?" inquired the detective.

"No." Miss Holt supplemented her curt monosyllable by adding, "the house is well built and the walls are sound proof, besides, Mrs. Endicott's suite of rooms is in the ell. Miss Endicott did not have to pass our door to reach her bedroom. Why do you ask?" looking keenly at him.

Barlow gnawed at his upper lip before answering. "It strikes me as singular that no one waited up for Miss Endicott and Mrs. Langhorne," he said musingly.

"Two young women out alone at night; surely Professor Endicott or the butler should have remained downstairs to let them in."

"It is odd," agreed Miss Holt. "But Professor Endicott told me he was suffering from an ulcerated tooth and he went to bed with a hot water bag and a large dose of whiskey; he might have given Pierre orders to wait up until they returned."

"He might have," dryly, "but Pierre denies it." Barlow turned and took several restless steps up and down the sun parlor. Suddenly he halted before her. "Miss Holt," striking one palm against the other, "I'm inclined to believe Page, the taxi driver, when he says he did not kill Mrs. Langhorne."

"But so far evidence points to his guilt," she argued.

"Not at all," he interrupted quickly. "There's the discrepancy in time. Miss Endicott declares Mrs. Langhorne left her at the Metropolitan Theater after the first show was over; that would be around nine o'clock; yet the autopsy shows that Mrs. Langhorne died about two o'clock in the morning—or approximately five hours later. Where did she spend the intervening time?"

"Driving about the city perhaps."

The suggestion met with a withering look. "In that downpour of rain! Recollect, Miss Holt, it was more like a cloudburst most of the night."

"Well," Miss Holt drew a long breath, "if Mrs. Langhorne didn't take the taxi on leaving the theater, when did she get in it?"

"Oh, dash it, that's what I'm trying to discover." Barlow made no attempt to conceal his irritation; Miss Holt was not usually so dense. He missed entirely the twinkle in the eyes behind the heavy lenses; the trained nurse had not worked with him without learning his moods and tenses and she long since had solved the best method of drawing him out. "Page declares his passenger was a man whom he picked up on Seventh Street near the wharves at about three o'clock in the morning. He insists that the man was still in his car in a drunken stupor when he parked in Normanstone Drive."

"If Page's story is true," argued Miss Holt, "you have yet another problem to solve, what became of the drunken passenger?"

Barlow groaned dismally. "He certainly wasn't there when we found Mrs. Langhorne's body inside the car," he admitted, lowering his voice to almost a whisper. "I'll get at the bottom of the mystery when I lay my hand on the motive for killing Mrs. Langhorne; and there, Miss Holt, you can help me."

"How?"

"By keeping tab on what goes on in this house," quickly. "There's a queer atmosphere here, almost as if it were a house of ill-will"

She nodded her head slowly, understandingly. "An undercurrent of—of—" hesitating for the right word; "lack of affection."

"Between whom?" eagerly.

Again the nurse hesitated. "I can't answer that now," she said; "it wouldn't be fair to create unjust suspicion, but I can say this," drawing a step closer. "Professor and Mrs. Endicott are far different in their manner to each other than when I was here last November; nothing tangible, but my instinct seldom plays me false." She glanced around. "Frankly, I'm puzzled, too, Mr. Barlow."

Barlow stuffed his hands in his pockets and regarded her steadfastly. "It's the devil," he agreed, then with a hasty look about the sun parlor. "Tell me, does Mrs. Endicott know that her son-in-law, Senator Langhorne, is staying in her house?"

"Professor Endicott gave instructions that she was not to be told." Miss Holt moved over to the door. "I must go back to her now, Mr. Barlow; how can I reach you?"

Barlow scribbled a number on a slip of paper and gave it to her as they approached the dining room. "You can always get me there; if I'm not in, leave a message with my assistant," and with a friendly pressure of her hand, he left the dining room via the side porch which opened from it.

Miss Holt was about to continue on her way to Mrs.

Endicott when she remembered the latter's request for the morning newspaper; a glimpse of the detective through the long French window as he walked along the terraced path sent her hurrying after him and the carefully folded newspaper tucked in his overcoat pocket. She could not return to Mrs. Endicott without the *Post,* for, if embarrassing questions should be asked, her search for it would explain her overlong absence from the sick room.

Some twenty minutes earlier Mrs. Endicott, sitting up in bed, made certain that she was alone, then, wasting no further time, she donned her dressing-gown and slipped through the bathroom and into her husband's bedroom. It was a large corner room and the sunlight poured through one of the windows, the shade of which was raised to the utmost. Her eyes were accustomed to semidarkness and Mrs. Endicott blinked a bit in the unexpected glare; she had given orders that all shades were to remain lowered until after her daughter's funeral that afternoon. The room was neat and trim in every particular except for a disorderly heap of clothes on one chair, and Mrs. Endicott frowned, hesitated, then moved on. She could send the maid later to put the clothes away.

Once in the center hall, Mrs. Endicott walked more quickly; it was cooler there and she was scantily clad. She faltered for a second when she reached her daughter's bedroom and laid her hand on the door knob, but

her object was the boudoir, just beyond it, and she continued hurriedly along the hall. The boudoir had been used always by Mary Langhorne and the sight of her familiar things brought a bitter pang to her mother's heart and the tears welled unbidden to the surface and ran down her cheeks as she opened the drawers of Mary's desk, one after the other and went through their contents with lightning rapidity.

Mrs. Endicott was about to give up her search when her eyes lighted on the paper she sought tucked inside a Dresden china wall pocket hanging near the desk. Snatching it out and regardless, in her haste, that she had dislodged other loose papers and scattered them upon the floor, Mrs. Endicott hastened toward her own suite of rooms. Farther along the open door of Caroline Endicott's bedroom caught her attention, and she crossed its threshold. She was halfway across the room when a deep-throated growl sent the hot blood back to her heart and she fled precipitously as Zeto, the Airedale, awakened from his nap on Caroline's bed, sprang down. With nose to the floor, trailing her slippered feet, Zeto crept after her. Terror lent wings to Mrs. Endicott's usually slow moving body, and with a burst of speed that would have astounded Miss Holt, she dashed into her room and flung herself on her bed a bare five minutes before the nurse returned.

Under warm covers once again Mrs. Endicott lay with shivers going up and down her spine while she

watched with distended eyes for a sight of Zeto. Her fears, however, were groundless. In her haste to enter her room a small card had slipped out of her grasp and it distracted the dog's attention. Sniffing it carefully over, he picked up the card and trotted down to the front door; for a few minutes he waited for some one to come and open it, then made a round of the first floor rooms. The wind blew in from an open window in the pantry and Zeto, clearing the low sill in one bound, raced along the path to the front of the house just as Caroline Endicott turned into the brick walk from the street. The girl and the dog made a charming picture as they greeted each other with an abandon of affection, at least so thought Senator Langhorne as he paused for some seconds to watch them.

"Your dog, Miss Endicott?" he asked casually and Caroline straightened up, while the startled color rose in her cheeks, dyeing them a most becoming pink.

"Mine, all mine," she replied. "Zeto Zeus is his name and I brought him from England. Shake hands with the Senator, Zeto."

As Langhorne bent gravely over and shook the furry paw offered him, he saw something white protruding from the dog's mouth.

"What have you got, old fellow?" he asked, and caught the end of the card. But Zeto's teeth remained locked and a low growl gave evidence of his feelings.

"Don't try to take it from him," exclaimed Caroline; "he won't give it up unless I tell him to."

Langhorne glanced at her. "So you think you can control him?"

"Absolutely. Zeto, let Senator Langhorne have the paper."

Zeto's big, intelligent eyes gazed from his mistress back to her companion; slowly his teeth relaxed their hold and the card lay in Langhorne's hand. As he turned it over, his face grew livid and Caroline stared aghast at his expression of bitter rage; it was gone in a flash and, his feelings masked under his quiet, suave manner, he addressed her in conventional tones.

"Fine dog you have, Miss Endicott; if ever you wish to part with Zeto let me know and I'll meet your price," and tossing the card in a clump of Japanese holly, he walked on up the street.

Too surprised for speech, Caroline stood where she was until Langhorne had entered a taxi and was driven rapidly away, then, on impulse, she went over to the bushes and retrieved the visiting card.

Tooth marked, decidedly crumpled and no longer clean though it was, she had no difficulty in reading the named engraved upon it: Carl Ashby, and written in the lower right-hand corner; P.P.C.

CHAPTER VI

P. P. C.

HISTORIC St. John's, or "The Church of the Presidents," to use the language of the man with the megaphone in sight-seeing busses, was more than half filled when Detective Barlow, accompanied by two men, slipped into one of the side pews well toward the front, and from that vantage point he and Ernest Page, the taxi driver, and the detective on the latter's right, listened to the Episcopal burial service with varying emotions. In the pews reserved for the family, Barlow saw Caroline Endicott standing straight and slim by her father's bent form, but his attention was chiefly centered on Senator Langhorne, the third person in the pew. The detective, however, gained nothing from his scrutiny. Langhorne stood with head slightly bowed, his eyes downcast and his whole demeanor one of stern repression; he turned slightly and the light from one of the stained glass windows intensified his pallor. It was an interesting face and an unusual one, Barlow decided; strength of character and intellectual attainments were indicated in the firm lips and broad forehead, while the

severity of his features was relieved by the deep dimple in his chin. Langhorne was far handsomer than the detective had realized during their interview the night before.

"Just the type to fascinate women," thought Barlow, and the grim look in his eyes deepened as he caught Caroline's furtive glances at Langhorne across her father's bent shoulders.

Unaware of Detective Barlow's presence in the church and of his interest in her, Caroline allowed her thoughts to drift away from the solemn words of the clergyman to the problem of how and why pretty Mary Langhorne had met so tragic a death. With everything in the world to live for—social position, money, love—Caroline's eyes again stole to her right, but Langhorne continued to look down and missed her glance; apparently he was following the burial service with fixed attention. Professor Endicott was using an already damp handkerchief to dry his eyes and Caroline felt a flush of shame at her lack of emotion; but how could she feel such deep grief? She and Mary had been strangers until only a few days before; true, the tragedy had shocked her profoundly, but it was the mystery of it which had gripped her imagination and stirred her out of herself. A violent fit of hysterics had kept Mrs. Endicott from attending the funeral and Caroline, considerably shaken by her stepmother's condition and bewildered by her father's avoidance of his

wife, had taken her place by Professor Endicott with outward composure and inward trepidation. In total silence the two had motored to the church and when Caroline turned around in the pew she had found, not only her father at her elbow, but Senator Langhorne entering just behind him.

The notes of Chopin's funeral march were filling the church when Caroline, at a sign from her father, started to follow him into the aisle, only pausing for an instant to replace the prayer book in the rack and pick up her bag which she had dropped on the cushioned seat at the commencement of the service. To her surprise it was not where she had left it. Considerably perturbed, she looked down at the floor and along the pew.

"Caroline, come at once!" The imperative command was almost hissed into her ear and Endicott's firm grip pulled her after him. He released her arm with equal suddenness just as they approached the altar and turned to their right to leave by the H Street entrance; for a brief moment Caroline faced the front pews at that side of the church. Under the mellow lights from the stained glass windows, one face stood out distinct and clear and, as she met the large mournful eyes, she almost cried out—the man who had been bowed in grief over Mary's dead body only the night before was but a few feet from her. Again her arm was taken and she was almost propelled from the

church, but it was not until she reached the Endicotts' limousine that Caroline realized she was half supported by Frederick Brent.

"Come with us to the cemetery, Brent," suggested Professor Endicott, and the young reporter took one of the folding seats at the moment his cousin, Senator Langhorne, sat down in the other.

As the flower-covered casket and its pallbearers passed from the church, followed by the members of the family, Ernest Page made an attempt to leave also, but the detective, handcuffed to him, jerked him back.

"Look at the people as they go out," directed Barlow in Page's ear. "See if you can pick your man." And obediently the taxi driver gazed at the well-dressed men and women filing slowly down the aisles.

Many faces were familiar to Page from photographs published in the daily papers, for the Endicotts had gained entrée into the exclusive resident circle as well as diplomatic and official Washington, and all three were represented at the funeral. Mary Langhorne had been among the most popular of the girls in the younger set and the news of her shocking death had stirred social Washington to its depths. The majority had attended the funeral with feelings of genuine grief; a few had come from motives of morbid curiosity and cheap sensationalism.

The presence of Senator Langhorne, whose arrival by airplane the morning newspapers had headlined,

and the absence of Mrs. Endicott in the pew reserved for relatives of the dead girl had not escaped notice, judging from the subdued comments among those leaving the church. The edifice was practically empty when Barlow turned to his companions, waiting patiently by his side.

"Well, Page, which one of the twenty or more men present was your passenger on Monday night?" he asked.

The taxi driver shook his head despondently. "I told you I couldn't see his features very well," he grumbled. "The toff had his coat collar turned up over his chin an' his hat down most over his eyes. If these 'ere guys hadn't a been bare-headed, I might-a recognized one of 'em."

The two detectives gazed blankly at each other. Barlow's chagrin was plain. "I'd have kept you outside"—he spoke over his shoulder as he went down the aisle just ahead of Page— "but there are several entrances to this church and I thought it best to bring you in so that you would see every one who was here."

The cold March wind was but faintly tempered by the fading afternoon sunshine and Page shivered when they stepped outside the church and crossed H Street to find Barlow's car parked on that thoroughfare.

"Where do we go from here?" he asked sourly from the back seat of the Hudson coach which he shared with the second detective.

"Police Headquarters." The car shot down H Street and swung into Madison Place. "The interment at Oak Hill is private," added Barlow; "there won't be any one there but Mrs. Langhorne's immediate family, and you can see them at any time for identification purposes."

Page's scowl deepened and he maintained a sullen silence until the three men were seated in Inspector Mitchell's private office in the Municipal Building.

"What do you mean by keeping me like this?" he demanded, raising his arm with the handcuff dangling from it. "Y'haven't got anything on me except that 'twas me drove the taxi Mrs. Langhorne was found dead in."

Barlow contemplated Page thoughtfully for a few seconds. "Take 'em off, Ben," he told his assistant, and waited until the handcuffs were reposing in Ben Logan's pocket. "Now, Page, tell us the truth."

"'Fore God, mister, I have!" There was no mistaking the man's earnestness. "I dunno how Mrs. Langhorne got in my car."

"Then you were deaf as well as dumb." Page's angry flush was observed by Barlow and he continued mockingly: "So you just sat there and let the woman be killed behind your back?"

"I didn't know she was there, I tell you!"—Page's voice rose almost to a scream. "I was asleep; wore out from drivin' in that storm."

"Where?" eagerly. "Who were your other fares that night?"

Page rubbed one hand over the other nervously. "I dunno." He used his favorite denial, but with less emphasis. "I ain't got no regular customers, just picks 'em up in the street."

"I see." Barlow sat back and stared with disconcerting intensity at the taxi driver. "For all it looks so ramshackle, your car's in prime condition, powerful, swift." He bent forward and his jaw shot out viciously. "You've been using that car for bootlegging."

"Have I?" with an air of indifference which inwardly surprised his questioner.

"Yes, you have—"

"All right, prove it."

Barlow smiled unpleasantly. "So you'd rather be arrested for murder than give away your bootlegging pals," he paused—"they must pay you well."

The taxi driver stirred in his seat. "No jury will convict me," he declared. "'Cause there ain't no real evidence against me." He waved his hand derisively. "Ye're jest wastin' yer time, mister. Why don't ye find the toff who was in the car when I fell asleep?"

Barlow's fist struck the arm of his chair with no uncertain force. "You've been hot-airing about him long enough—now come across with some identifying

information. You say he wore an overcoat, what color was it?"

"Dark," after a moment's reflection. "Black, I s'pose."

"His hat?"

"A regular top hat; I dunno whether it was new or not, an' he carried an umbrella," added Page. "He wore gloves, I noticed that when he put out his hand to close the door."

"How tall was he? Above medium height?"

Page hesitated. "He looked to be," he said cautiously. "His overcoat was long, anyway. I wish to God I'd a noticed him more, but 'twas rainin' in sheets. Say," he hitched his chair closer to Barlow. "What have ye done with the things I had in my pockets Tuesday mornin'?"

For answer Barlow swung his swivel chair around and opened a drawer of the desk at his back. From it he withdrew a motley assortment—a soiled handkerchief, keys, penknife, pencil, a crumpled package of cigarettes and a leather wallet, torn and worn at the corners.

"Where's the flask?" demanded Page excitedly, and once again the detective thrust his hand inside the drawer.

"Keep cool," suggested Barlow ironically, observing Page's eyes sparkle at sight of the flask. "Your belongings are safe with us."

"It ain't mine," retorted the other. "That there flask belonged to the toff."

Barlow straightened up with a jerk. "What! Why didn't you mention that fact before?"

"I clean forgot it," confessed Page shamefacedly. "What with drinking the liquor in the flask which I took from the toff an' the shock I had when I found that there was a dead woman lying in his place the next morning, I ain't thought clear since. Say, mister, ain't there nothin' on the flask to tell us who it belongs to?"

Barlow, with Logan at his side, turned the flask over several times and then weighed it in the palm of his hand. It was a handsome piece of silver, evidently purchased by a person of discriminating taste; an attractive design was etched on the outer side, but the back, which curved inward so as to make it fit more securely in a hip pocket, was entirely plain and without ornamentation.

"It cost a lot of money," remarked Logan, "but d'gone it, there isn't a name or initial engraved on the flask, Barlow. Is there a jeweler's name inside the top?"

Barlow shook his head. "Only the sterling mark," he said; "a tour of the stores may prove its ownership, however, and that's your job, Ben."

His assistant reached for his hat but paused at

hearing a slight exclamation escape Barlow; the latter had switched on the desk lamp and was studying the flask under its direct rays, while Page was bending eagerly over his shoulder.

"The silver's been badly scratched," commented Barlow, rubbing his finger over the flat surface of the back. "Here, Ben, find a magnifying glass among my papers—thanks," as it was thrust into his hand. For several minutes he and the two men studied the flask in silence. "It looks as if some one, perhaps a child, has tried to scratch letters in the metal with a pin."

"Hold it in that light," exclaimed Page. "There, I can make 'em out—P.P.C. Pshaw, they don't mean nothin'!" And he dropped back in his chair with a feigned disgust which covered a rapidly beating heart under his threadbare clothing.

Upon their return from the cemetery, Fred Brent was the first one out of the limousine when it drew up under the *porte cochère* of the Endicott mansion and he turned to assist Caroline, but she had sprung past him and was up the few steps to the side door, held open by Pierre, without touching his outstretched hand. Her father, following more leisurely, stopped at the lower step to address Senator Langhorne, who was still seated in the car.

"I particularly wish that you would return here, Barry," he said; "for many reasons." He paused to

clear his throat. "Make this your headquarters for the next week at least."

Langhorne hesitated; then his eyes swept past the older man leaning heavily on his cane and sought Caroline, still standing in the doorway listening with downcast eyes to what young Brent was saying; there was no mistaking the latter's evident admiration and ardent manner.

"It's very kind of you, Professor," Langhorne awoke with a start to the lengthening pause, and spoke hurriedly, disjointedly. "I'll come back to-night anyway, and we can talk things over. Fred"—his voice deepened, carrying a commanding note which brought a hot flush to his cousin's cheeks. "Come down town with me." And barely waiting for Brent to get inside the limousine, he motioned to the chauffeur to close the door.

Caroline left her father talking to Pierre as the latter assisted him out of his overcoat and went in quest of a drink of water; she was very thirsty. She was gone less than five minutes; recrossing the hall she saw her father just disappearing up the staircase, and ran after him. Evidently Endicott failed to hear her low spoken "Dad," for he walked inside his bedroom and deliberately closed the door.

With the door shut almost in her face, Caroline stood stock still and bit her lip. It was unreasonable to feel hurt, but for all that tears filled her eyes. The

big house, silent, somber; the total lack of sympathy, of interest even, shown by her father in her or her welfare made her feel like an interloper. It was with almost a sob that she turned and sought the garage.

Her arrival there was greeted with yelps of joy and Zeto Zeus nearly knocked her down in his delight at being with her. Releasing the dog, Caroline started with him for a brisk walk; she felt the need of exercise and she doubted if Pierre had taken Zeto out of the garage in her absence, as he had promised. Utterly indifferent as to the direction she took, but anxious to avoid traffic, Caroline stuck to Massachusetts Park, following the numerous footpaths until she felt her nervousness depart. She was considering returning home when, rounding a turn in the road, she saw Page's dilapidated looking Cadillac car still parked half in the gutter, but no policeman nor detective now lingered near it.

Why had not the police removed the car? Caroline puzzled over that question even as she approached the Cadillac; perhaps they were waiting for the owner to send for it; but then Page, according to her father, was still held in jail under suspicion and he couldn't very well come for the car. With wide, curious eyes, Caroline walked around and around the Cadillac, taking further note of every detail; she was not familiar with the American type of car but in England had often driven her uncle's coupé.

Opening the door, Caroline on impulse climbed inside, but she was careful to seat herself in the opposite corner to that which had been occupied by Mary Langhorne. The woodwork and upholstery were undoubtedly of the best and Caroline concluded that the car must have been custom built and that only the best material had been used. With quick, deft fingers she ran her hands over the upholstery and down behind the cushions of the back seat, but her search went unrewarded; pshaw, it was stupid of her to think that she could find some clue to the crime; the police must have examined every square inch of the car.

Zeto, spying Caroline in the car, came bounding in through the open door, and his inquisitive nose followed every movement of her hands; finally, discouraged, she sat back in her corner, while the dog curled up on the seat beside her. She sat with puckered brows, going over in her mind all that she had learned of Mary's mysterious death and the finding of her body. In brooding thoughtfulness her eyes lighted on the bare boards of the floor. Why had the carpet alone been removed, and by whom? Were there muddy footprints on it which would have provided a clue as to the identity of the murderer?

As the idea occurred to her, Caroline straightened up—it certainly was worth considering. Suppose she could find the carpet? It wasn't such a bad idea, but—

where should she look? For fully ten minutes she sat in deep thought, then stirred suddenly, her eyes sparkling.

"Zeto," and at the excitement in her voice, the dog raised his head and looked at her with adoring eyes. "Down, and sniff this floor—now the upholstery"—as the dog, his keen intelligence responsive to her slightest wish, nosed up and down the floor of the car. "Go find it, Zeto." And she sprang outside even as she spoke, the dog at her heels.

Back and forth he sniffed the ground while she waited with undiminished patience; suddenly he started off up the hillside, somewhat in the direction of the Endicott mansion, but more to the north of it and Caroline hastened after him. On and on they went, her excitement increasing; it was getting darker, much darker, and both girl and dog paused abruptly when their last run through the wood brought them to a clearing. A small lawn led to a house, dark save for a red lamp in the window of what was apparently a study or small living room. It was an English cottage type of house and its quaint architecture blended perfectly with the landscape.

With Zeto close at her heels, Caroline crossed the lawn and rang the bell, but no one came to open the front door and after several futile efforts she walked toward the road and continued along it until she reached the main highway. A policeman was walking

his beat and paused at her approach, touching his cap respectfully.

"Good evening, Officer." Caroline's soft tones brought a pleased smile to O'Bryan's lips and his pleasure grew as he glimpsed her lovely eyes; it was seldom so pretty a girl stopped to speak to him. "Can you tell me who occupies that little cottage down yonder," pointing in the direction she had come.

"Sure, Miss, an' that's 'Hide Away,' Mr. Carl Ashby's place; good evenin', Miss," and he moved on with many a backward glance at the girl and her dog—"Both of 'em beauties," he confided later to his better half. "I'm thinkin' it's the young daughter of that queer divil, Professor Endicott."

Caroline, unaware of the curiosity she had aroused, walked thoughtfully toward Woodland Drive. The name, Carl Ashby, troubled her; it had an oddly familiar sound. Ah, she had it! It was the name engraved on the P.P.C. card which Senator Langhorne had tossed away with such evident emotion. But was she right? Caroline shook a puzzled head; only a glance at the card would verify her recollection.

Suddenly Caroline stopped dead in her tracks. She had put the visiting card for safekeeping in her bag, and that bag she had lost that afternoon in St. John's Church.

CHAPTER VII

A QUESTION OF WEAPONS

THE red glow from the fire on the hearth cast fantastic shadows on Caroline Endicott, sitting near the huge stone chimney which took up almost one end of the wide hall, and Pierre, carrying a silver salver, passed like another black shadow as he offered the after dinner coffee to Professor Endicott and his guests, Senator Langhorne and the latter's cousin, Fred Brent, who had been persuaded earlier that evening to stay to dinner. Pierre inadvertently stumbled over a footstool as he approached the professor and received a sharp word of rebuke for his clumsiness.

"Put the tray here," Endicott added, indicating a table against the wall. "And later bring another pot of coffee; have it strong, Pierre."

"Oui, M'sieu," and the butler slipped away, thankful to return to the kitchen where a warm fire and congenial company awaited him.

In the depths of her wing chair Caroline was also inwardly breathing a prayer of thankfulness that the ordeal of dinner was safely over. She had eaten the

delicious dishes prepared by her father's cook with an appetite sharpened by her long walk with Zeto, and between courses had kept up her end of a conversation which threatened to lapse into embarrassing silence, for neither Professor Endicott nor Fred Brent was inclined to talk. Her efforts were seconded by Senator Langhorne and Caroline had several times eyed him with frank curiosity as he sat across the table from her. She had expected to find him morose and silent, but instead he had chatted interestingly, even brilliantly, on many topics. Even his appearance had changed; instead of the stern-visaged man of the afternoon, his eyes sparkled and his animation gave clear indication of a nature seeking expression rather than repression.

"Miss Caroline"—the girl actually jumped and young Brent looked at her apologetically from the ottoman where he had seated himself a second before to be near her. "I thought you saw me cross the hall, but I fear I startled you."

"You did," she admitted candidly, with a catch in her throat. "I was—"

"Day dreaming?" And even as he put the question teasingly, Brent wondered if Caroline, realizing the charming effect of the flickering firelight on her exotic beauty, had selected the chair with studied intention. He was accustomed to sophistication among the débutantes of Washington and the few times he

had seen Caroline he had observed a quickness of perception which belied the childlike innocence of her lovely eyes.

Caroline shook her head. "No," she responded. "I was just thinking—" her friendly smile caused Brent to move his ottoman closer to her side. "How old is Senator Langhorne?"

The abrupt question brought a sharp look from Brent, then his gaze drifted across the hall to where his cousin stood under a sidelight, absorbed in reading a letter.

"Thirty-six—"

"What? So young!" Caroline's utter astonishment brought an amused twinkle into Brent's eyes.

"He isn't exactly a Methuselah," speaking in a low, confidential tone which Caroline imitated.

"But his hair is turning gray," she protested, "and I thought all United States Senators were old—"

"Not all," with a faint chuckle he could not repress. "And as a family we are frequently prematurely gray—see, I have some white locks myself."

"They are well concealed," Caroline reverted swiftly to the man under discussion. "Why did my stepmother lay such stress on the difference in age between Mary and her husband?"

Brent raised his head with a jerk. "She was sixteen years younger than Barry," he pointed out. "Twenty is too young to die."

Caroline shivered in spite of the heat from the blazing logs.

"Don't," she pleaded in an undertone. "It's all so horrible."

Brent nodded sympathetically. "I agree with you," he exclaimed. "Barry's manner at dinner was a bit of a shock. When you stop to think that he had just buried his wife, his talkativeness was—was—" hunting about for a word, "cold-blooded."

"Perhaps it was a natural reaction from a succession of horrors," shrewdly, with a wisdom beyond her years. "I"—raising shy eyes to his, "I like your cousin."

"Good!" Brent's emphatic ejaculation carried across the hall and aroused Langhorne from the revery into which he had fallen. With a characteristic squaring of his shoulders he sauntered over to where they sat.

"Where did your father go, Miss Caroline?" he asked, and at the question Caroline leaned forward and looked quickly about.

"I'm sure I don't know; I thought he was sitting behind me," she half rose; "perhaps I'd better find him."

"He'll return," objected Brent. "Do sit down," and his coaxing tone tinted Caroline's cheeks a deeper pink as she sank back in her chair and looked at her companions. Their friendly regard was as good as a tonic to the homesick girl. Why couldn't her father

take a like interest in her and her well-being? What if he had just lost a stepdaughter, however dear, she, Caroline, was his own flesh and blood.

"Miss Caroline," Langhorne spoke with marked hesitation, and she tipped her head back against the chair and from that comfortable angle studied him attentively as he stood, resting one arm along the chimney mantel. "Has it occurred to you that your father isn't—isn't in his usual health?"

"No." It was her turn to hesitate and she colored painfully as she caught his inquiring gaze. "You see, I don't know what his 'usual health' is. I—" she stumbled in her speech. "We only met last week."

Brent, sitting hunched on the ottoman, his arms locked about his knee, rocked his body gently back and forth in thought. He had not yet solved to his entire satisfaction the reason for Caroline's sudden appearance on the scene, nor, in fact, why her very existence had escaped mention in the family. Perhaps it was that Mrs. Endicott wished to get her own daughter married off before she introduced her stepdaughter to Washington society. He brightened at the idea; such things had occurred before, and certainly, in her way, Caroline Endicott surpassed Mary Langhorne in actual beauty.

It was Brent who broke the lengthening pause. "Too bad, Barry, to agitate Miss Caroline about her father. You," with one of his teasing, tantalizing

smiles, "don't usually concern yourself over Professor Endicott's health."

But Langhorne paid not the slightest attention to the remark, busying himself instead with lighting a cigar. It was drawing nicely when the portières in front of the entrance leading to the *porte cochère* at the side of the house, parted, and Pierre ushered in Detective Barlow.

"Good evening," he exclaimed, unheeding the coldness of his welcome, for neither of the two men moved and Caroline contented herself with a faint ejaculation. "Where's Professor Endicott?" glancing inquiringly around.

"I'll find him"—and Caroline started to rise.

"Please don't," holding up a protesting hand. "I really came to see the Senator and you folks, so don't go; your dad'll be along soon." Barlow dropped down on the nearest chair and rubbed one hand over the other. "Have they told you, Senator, that the inquest will be held to-morrow afternoon?"

"No."

"Ah, then you were out when Coroner Penfield called?"

"Yes," and at the second abrupt monosyllable, the detective flushed; he was not entirely impervious to discourtesy and Langhorne made no effort to conceal his contempt for the little man sitting across from where he stood. There was nothing awe-inspiring

about Barlow, he looked more like a country clergyman than a member of the Central Office; only his deep sunken eyes were indicative of his mental alertness and tenacity.

"Well, if you didn't see the coroner," he began, with unabated good humor, "you didn't learn the outcome of the post-mortem examination and what killed your wife."

For the first time Langhorne seemed shaken out of his calm.

"The papers had it she was shot," he exclaimed, his words tumbling over each other; "killed by a thirty-two caliber bullet."

Barlow drew his handkerchief across his lips and then replaced it in his pocket.

"Did she own a revolver?" he asked; "and of that caliber?"

"Yes."

"Sure?"

"Quite sure," dryly; his hands in his trousers pockets closed and unclosed spasmodically, but Langhorne's voice was under admirable control. "I gave it to Mary some months ago. She was an excellent shot."

"So I've been told," responded the detective, his eyes never leaving Langhorne seemingly, but for all that he was conscious of Caroline's alert attention and that Brent had straightened up from his lounging

attitude. "In fact it was no novelty to her to hit the bull's-eye, and so—" Langhorne leaned back until his shoulders touched the stone chimney, while he waited in vain for Barlow to complete his sentence.

"And so," he repeated— "Are you trying to insinuate that my wife committed suicide."

"Suicide!" exclaimed Brent, surprise causing him to speak louder than he realized, and a figure passing along the hall on the floor above paused near the staircase to overhear the conversation going on below. "The idea is absurd."

"Why?" questioned Barlow swiftly.

"Why, for instance there was no weapon found near the body," protested the young reporter.

"That is not conclusive proof that it was not suicide," argued the detective quietly. "It may have been found—and thrown away."

"Found? By whom?" The questions shot from Langhorne with nervous rapidity.

Barlow's gesture was characteristic. "Possibly, not probably, mind you, but possibly Page, the taxi driver—" Then seeing the incredulity in his listeners' faces, he added, "That guess, now, is as good as another. What were you going to say, Miss?" observing Caroline's eager interest.

"Who first discovered that Mary was dead?" she asked.

"Mr. Carl Ashby, the painter." Involuntarily Caro-

line's gaze swept upward and rested on Langhorne, but his face was in shadow and she could not read his expression. "Mr. Ashby was taking his customary early morning stroll through Massachusetts Park, saw the parked car and investigated."

"Did he find any sort of a weapon?" asked Brent, as his cousin and Caroline remained silent.

Barlow shook his head. "He'd have given it to Jim Ryan, Motor Cycle Corps, whom he summoned." The detective stroked his clean-shaven chin thoughtfully. "Senator Langhorne, there was no blackening of the skin or scorching of the clothing, as far as we could discover, which occurs when a weapon is discharged at close range."

The fire had died down and Langhorne tossed several logs on the hot embers before addressing Barlow. "Smokeless powder does not blacken the skin," he pointed out, as he stood up and brushed the dust from his fingers by rubbing them gently across each other.

"True," acknowledged the detective; he drew a deep breath and let it out slowly. "But the autopsy proved conclusively that Mrs. Langhorne was not shot, but was stabbed to death."

Langhorne took three steps forward and stared at Barlow, his face like chalk.

"What—what's that?" he stammered.

"She was killed by a sharp-edged, pointed knife," explained Barlow patiently; "for the wound was in

the shape of a puncture; the weapon penetrated to a vital part and death ensued almost immediately." He paused before adding, "the nature of the wound is conclusive proof that it was not self-inflicted."

Langhorne turned abruptly away and, ignoring their presence, paced rapidly back and forth across the hall, then paused with equal suddenness at Caroline's elbow. Her eyes rested on him with growing intentness. It was a sad face which met her gaze, but one radiating grim determination.

"In the past forty-eight hours I have realized—many things," Langhorne began, "and have arrived at one definite conclusion." His powerful hands clenched themselves spasmodically, until the nails dug into the flesh. "My wife's murder shall be avenged, so help me God!" His deep voice vibrated through the silent hall and the creeping figure on the floor above shivered, then moved softly, very softly, back into the shadows.

Abruptly Langhorne turned to his silent audience and addressed the detective.

"I wish to offer a reward of twenty thousand dollars for reliable information leading to the arrest and conviction of the murderer," he stated. "How shall I get that information before the public, Mr. Barlow?"

"Through the police precincts—"

"And the newspapers," broke in Brent, springing to his feet. "Will you release the story now, Barry?" drawing out copy paper and pencil.

"Why not jump in my car and stop at Police Headquarters and the newspaper offices as well," suggested Barlow, whose whole demeanor had brightened. "Come, sir, it won't take us long."

Langhorne paused irresolutely for a second, then turning, bowed to Caroline.

"Will you excuse us—"

"Certainly." Caroline, too, had risen, and she accompanied them to the *porte cochère,* under which Barlow had parked his car. Langhorne lingered a second before closing the door.

"Please tell your father not to wait up for me," he said. "Good night."

As the door closed behind him, Caroline was conscious of an added feeling of loneliness; the past hour had proven more interesting than she had anticipated, and the detective's news and its reception by Langhorne had given her food for thought. She wandered restlessly about the living room, reading the evening paper for a short time, then hearing the rattle of china she went into the hall again, to find Pierre removing the after-dinner coffee cups and bringing a fresh supply of hot coffee.

"Father isn't here—"

"I know, Mam'selle; M'sieu is upstairs, but he always come for his coffee lataire an' ze papaire. Will you have anozzer cup, Mam'selle?"

"No, thanks, Pierre; but when you go to the kitchen

will you ask Nurse Nana to come here;" and Caroline turned back to reënter the living room, but the butler's reply brought her to an abrupt halt.

"She haf lef' for New York zis afternoon—"

"What!" Caroline gazed at him in utter unbelief. "Without saying one word to me? You have lost your mind, Pierre."

"Non, non," spreading out his hands in an expressive gesture. "Nana, she lef'; I took her to ze depot when every one was at ze funeral. M'sieu, your fazzer, send her to New York to take ze boat back to Englan'."

Caroline stared at him aghast. "It is absurd, unbelievable!" she stormed. "Where is father?"

Pierre scratched his head. "Ef he ees not in his bedroom, he mus' be in his office on ze third floor, Mam'selle," and he started for the pantry, silver salver in hand. "He like not to be disturb' up there."

Pierre's admonition was wasted on thin air; Caroline was already halfway up the staircase. A glance inside her father's bedroom proved that it was empty, and hot in spirit, she sought the third floor. To think that Nana, her dear old nurse, had been sent home without her having been consulted, and without one word of good-by! Caroline's hot anger dried her tears even as they filled her eyes—not to see Nana again—it should not—must not be, if a telegram could catch her in New York and postpone her sailing.

Caroline had been only once before on the third floor and she paused in some uncertainty on finding that the hall was unlighted; Mary Langhorne had taken her up there to see her father's "workshop" as it was called in the family. In reality it resembled a small museum. Costly rugs were on the floor, rich hangings from the Orient decorated the walls, while trophies of the hunt from many lands, rare curios and scientific objects, such as are to be found only in the collection of a wealthy archæologist, occupied their allotted space in cabinets and show cases.

As Caroline's eyes grew accustomed to the darkness she made out several closed doors to her right and recollected that they must lead either to an unused bedroom or to the huge attic which extended along one side of the house; if that was the case, the door that she sought was almost at the end of the hall. Cautiously she walked along, the soft carpet deadening her footsteps, until she came to the room she was looking for and turned the knob of the door.

A light shone over the top of the tall Japanese screen, which was stretched across the threshold and without hesitancy she walked around it, her feet sinking deep into the priceless rugs with which the floor was strewn. For a minute she thought herself alone when a faint sound on her left caused her to look in that direction.

Her father was seated before his flat-top desk in

his leather-covered, deep-cushioned swivel chair; he was bending down fumbling at something in one of the desk drawers and her presence escaped his notice. Suddenly he straightened up and the light from the desk lamp fell full on the knife in his hand. It was upraised—it touched his throat—

"Dad! Stop!"

Slowly, very slowly the knife was lowered and father and daughter eyed each other across the desk as, step by step, Caroline advanced.

"Give me that knife!" Automatically his fingers released their hold on the hilt and she took it from him. His eyes fell before hers. So they stood for one painful minute.

"Go!" he choked over the word. "Oh, for God's sake, go!"

Caroline swung about and went stumbling from the room.

She was hardly conscious of the direction she took, her main desire being to get some place where she could be alone and reduce her chaotic thoughts to reason. Her temples throbbed but the blood in her veins felt icy.

"Miss Caroline"— The girl backed hastily around, holding the knife behind her, and came face to face with Miss Holt, the trained nurse. "Is anything the matter?" in alarm, observing her white, strained expression.

"Oh, no, no—I'm—I'm tired," confusedly.

"You look it," sympathetically. "Get into bed and let me give you an alcohol rub—it will do you a world of good. Now, don't say a word, I'm coming."

"But your patient? You can't leave her."

"Mrs. Endicott is sleeping quietly." Miss Holt took her by the arm and went with her, unresisting, toward her bedroom. "Go in, Miss Endicott, and I'll be back as soon as I get the alcohol," and she sped down the hall.

Closing the door firmly, Caroline turned on one of the electric lights and examined the knife which she had carried concealed in a fold of her skirt. It might have been a toy rapier, so perfectly did it counterpart the larger weapon in shape and in sharpness, but the burnished steel blade was dulled in spots. Hesitatingly Caroline moistened her finger and touched one of the spots—then looked at her finger again, closely. The skin was streaked with a tiny fleck of dried blood.

Upstairs in his workshop Professor Endicott stood as if carved from stone—where Caroline had left him—for fully five minutes. Suddenly he tossed his arms aloft in supplication, then fell, face downward, prone across his desk.

CHAPTER VIII

ELUSIVE CLUES

CAROLINE twisted restlessly on her pillow; why hadn't she asked Miss Holt for a glass of water before the trained nurse returned to Mrs. Endicott? The alcohol rub and Miss Holt's wholesome personality had done much to soothe the overexcited girl and she had grown fairly composed before being left for the night. That was fully two hours previous; it must be pretty close to midnight, if not later than that.

Caroline sighed drearily; if only she could have remained asleep! Perhaps if she got a drink and quenched her thirst she would not continue awake. Switching on the reading lamp which stood close at hand on the bed table, she slid out of bed and crossed the large room to the adjoining bathroom.

The sound of running water drowned the noise made by the cautious opening and closing of her door leading into the hall, and Caroline, entirely oblivious of that fact, shut off the faucet and came back, carrying a tumbler of water. The bed, which was a high, carved, four poster, requiring steps to mount it, was the pride

of Mrs. Endicott's heart. It had descended from father to son from their Cavalier ancestor until it had reached her generation and she had inherited it from her bachelor brother, whose early demise had given all the family heirlooms into her possession, as well as his share of an ample family fortune, which he had augmented by sagacious investments.

The rich brocaded hangings belonging to the bed had withstood the ravages of time, and each summer Mrs. Endicott had superintended the task of packing them away in camphor; with equal care they were replaced with the coming of fall. On sleepless mornings Caroline had amused herself with deciphering the armorial bearings embroidered on the brocade which stretched across the head of the bed, but the heavy side curtains were a distinct trial to her, and she had looped them back repeatedly, only to have a scandalized maid adjust them to Mrs. Endicott's liking.

On going to bed that evening Caroline had moved the small table as close as she could get it and had draped the curtain hanging on that side of the bed around it; thus she was enabled to have an electric lamp at her elbow as she lay in bed and read without discomfort, for she had not anticipated being able to sleep; the scene with her father was still too vividly before her. But her tired muscles and taut nerves had relaxed under Miss Holt's clever ministrations and she had slept.

Caroline placed the tumbler of water on the bed table; at dinner she had eaten plentifully of the Smithfield ham which had been served with the salad, and she felt as if she required a tank to quench her thirst. Before mounting the three mahogany steps, she glanced under the bed to make sure her slippers were where she had put them; as soon as it was dawn she planned to slip out and bring Zeto back to her bedroom. At that hour the servants were not likely to be around and she could smuggle the dog inside without fear of discovery.

For nearly half an hour Caroline read the book she had borrowed from her father's library; it was not enlivening reading, but anything was better than her thoughts; finally her head drooped lower and lower on the pillow and her regular breathing indicated that she had dozed off into slumber.

The brocaded curtains at the head of the bed and those encircling the bed table moved gently as if stirred by a breath of air, then they were parted by a hand; it hovered over the tumbler and a white powder slid into the water from a small paper held in the long, nervous fingers, which were swiftly withdrawn. But in so doing the paper slipped from their grasp and fluttered down on the pillow beside Caroline's book. Her sleep was of short duration and it was with a start that she awoke five minutes later.

Reaching over she drank the tumbler of water; it

was still cool and, greatly refreshed, she turned back to her novel. After reading for ten or more minutes, she looked toward the bed table for a book mark and the paper on her pillow caught her eye. Inserting it in her place, she closed the book with a snap, put it on the table and switched off the electric light.

The utter darkness of the room was a relief and Caroline closed her eyes, snuggling down under the bedclothes; the high bed was comfortable even if the heavy hangings occasionally gave her a sense of suffocation. Quickly her thoughts reverted to her father; she sighed bitterly, he was never very far from her thoughts at any time since sailing for this country. On the voyage across she had wondered what manner of man would meet her in New York; what was he like, in reality, this ideal of her childhood? She had imagined him, middle-aged perhaps, but retaining the romance of youth and the dashing figure of a fit mate for her beautiful young mother, whose portrait she adored. Her disillusionment had proven complete; middle-aged, assuredly, but, chilled by her father's unfriendly manner, she had not looked below the surface for the meaning of the unaccustomed trembling of his hands, nor detected the yearning in his carefully averted eyes. Prosaic, austere, curt and self-absorbed, so she had judged him, and she had unburdened her cruel disappointment to her only intimate in that household, Nurse Nana. And now Nurse Nana had

gone, without a word to her, and she was left with a greater problem than she had ever faced before.

The horror of Mary Langhorne's death paled into insignificance before her realization that her father had contemplated suicide and, but for her unexpected appearance, would have cut his throat that night. Caroline dragged the bedclothes closer and huddled down in the soft and yielding mattress; despite the warmth around her she was shivering. In her lightening appraisement of the situation in the room on the third floor she had seen clearly that her father had not broken the skin across his throat. Then how came the rapierlike dagger to have blood stains upon it—dried blood stains at that!

Caroline's heart turned cold within her. What was it Detective Barlow had said earlier that evening: "Mrs. Langhorne was killed by a sharp-edged, pointed knife." The weapon in her father's hand answered that description, but how had he become possessed of it?

The question pounded around and around in her feverish brain; vainly she tried to forget it as she squirmed about in the bed; but there was no dodging the issue. If Professor Endicott was known to have had the dagger with which his stepdaughter was killed, might he not be thought guilty of the crime? If it was known that he had tried to commit suicide with the same knife, would that not convince people

of his guilt? Under such circumstances would they stop to consider a motive, or lack of it, for the deed?

Caroline's cheeks were wet with tears and she stuffed the bedclothes into her mouth to choke back a sob. Whatever his shortcomings as a father, he *was* her father and her loyalty was up in arms. Pride, inherited from an ancient race, made her repudiate the very suggestion that he was the murderer of a defenseless woman.

"I'll—I'll—" She was unaware that she spoke aloud; her throat felt parched and burning; struggling to sit up, her head sagged forward instead—she dropped back among the pillows and fell into uneasy slumber. In her dreams her room seemed full of people who muttered and mumbled to themselves as they went through her few belongings, then faces, strangely distorted, peeped at her from behind the bed curtains, but back of them all appeared a gibbet and the noose swayed dizzily before her agonized gaze.

The bedroom was flooded with sunlight when Caroline opened her eyes and sat up. The movement caused excruciating pains to dart through her head and she raised her hands and pressed them against her forehead and over her eyes; even her eyeballs were sore to the touch and she had a decided sense of nausea. Unsteadily she got to her feet—a hot bath would make her feel more like herself; she paused, however, and cast a resentful look at the four poster—she pre-

ferred a cot in the garage, with Zeto for company, to being smothered to death in the depths of a feather bed!

Detective Barlow was late in keeping his appointment and Inspector Mitchell did not look altogether pleased as the hands of the clock in his private office approached noon. It was for the third time that he scanned the article in the Washington *Post*, with its display headline: "Langhorne Murder Still Unsolved; Local Detective Bureau Apparently at Sea." It was not encouraging reading, especially on an empty stomach, and he was exceedingly hungry, having breakfasted at an early hour. Shoving back his chair, he went across the hall and came face to face with the man for whom he was looking. With a gruff greeting Mitchell led the way back to his office.

"Seen that?" he demanded, pointing to the offending article. "Why didn't they use an announcement of Senator Langhorne's twenty thousand dollar reward instead of wasting their energies poking fun at us?"

Barlow's startled eyes swept the half sheet; the date line caught his attention. "That's from yesterday's paper, Chief," smothering a smile as he spoke; Mitchell was sufficiently irritated. "There's to-day's edition;" and he hurried over to the large scrap basket and dragged out a paper, accidentally thrown there

earlier that morning. "That reward should be a big help to us."

"It should," grimly. "Well, any news?"

Barlow did not at once sit down, nor did he answer immediately.

"See here, Chief," laying a silver flask on the desk before the inspector. "What do you think of that?"

"Very handsome," commented that latter. "Any finger prints on it?"

"Only Page's." The detective laid the piece of oil silk in which he carried the flask on the table also. "His marks are smeared all over it."

"Ah, then it belonged to the driver of the death car?"

Barlow shook his head in dissent. "Nope; he claims he found it in the possession of his male passenger on Monday night. See there," using the point of his pencil as a guide, "the letters, P.P.C. have been scratched in with a sharp instrument—a penknife or possibly a big pin. Maybe they are the initials of the owner, but"—with a dubious frown—"again they may be meant to stand for Page, if he's lying and the flask *is* his."

"He gave his first name as Ernest." Mitchell stared at the flask in silence for a moment, then reached inside a desk drawer and pulled out a dictionary. "As you say the letters may be initials—"

"They sound kind of familiar," admitted Barlow;

"but I can't connect any one having them with the murder of Mary Langhorne; there isn't any one, except Page, who has a P in his name."

The inspector was busy for a few seconds hunting through the dictionary and did not reply at once.

"Have you tried to trace the flask through the stores?" he inquired, and Barlow nodded glumly. "No success, eh?"

"Just so; drew blank. Evidently the flask was not purchased in Washington. What have you there?" as Mitchell spread the dictionary open upon the desk.

"The initials P.P.C. have a special social usage," the latter explained. "Both men and women put the three letters on their visiting cards when making farewell calls. They represent the French phrase: *Pour Prendre Congé,*" reading the words from the dictionary. "In plain United States the phrase means 'To take leave.' "

"Well, God knows, the poor lady in the death car did that with exceeding suddenness." Barlow rubbed his forehead thoughtfully. "I don't suppose those scratched letters have anything on earth to do with Mrs. Langhorne's murder, but maybe I can trace the owner of the flask through them."

Mitchell replaced the dictionary in the drawer and looked up. "Three days have gone by and we haven't a good guess even as to the motive inspiring the murder," he grumbled. "It wasn't robbery, apparently,

for Mrs. Langhorne hadn't anything with her to steal; she was happily married—"

"A runaway match," broke in Barlow, "and after a brief honeymoon, she came here to be with her mother and stepfather, and her husband, the senator —went elsewhere."

The eyes of the two men crossed. "Have you looked into that end of it?" Mitchell put the question swiftly as he rose. "Shall I keep the flask or will you?"

For answer Barlow rolled it again in the oil silk and put the flask back in his pocket.

"I'm told that it was a love match," he remarked. "Certainly from a worldly point of view she did very well; Senator Langhorne is wealthy, clever and popular."

"How about her, though—was she equally wealthy?"

Barlow hesitated. "Appearances lead me to think so; that is, her mother's very rich, but I'm not sure Mrs. Langhorne had money in her own right."

"A good point to look up." Mitchell struggled into his overcoat. "Had Mrs. Langhorne any intimate girl friends?"

"Apparently not; I'm told she preferred the society of men—"

"Hm! Jealousy might be the motive we're looking for." Mitchell paused at the door, one eye on the

clock and the other considering Barlow; if he didn't hurry he would not be able to get luncheon, as he had but a short twenty minutes to himself before it would be necessary to keep an important engagement.

"It might be the motive," agreed the detective. "Don't lose patience, Chief," as the latter gave vent to a short ejaculation. "I'll be able to lay my hands on something tangible in the next twenty-four hours; why, already there are four possible suspects."

"Who, for instance?"

"Page, the taxi driver," Barlow lowered his voice as he accompanied the inspector to the door. "His mysterious passenger," he paused and looked up and down; for the moment the two men had the broad corridor to themselves, and there was no danger of their words being overheard. "And Senator Langhorne."

"So?" Mitchell's eyes snapped with interest. "Well, who's the fourth on your list, the stepfather?"

Barlow contented himself with a brief "Yes."

"And in the Endicott household—"

"There are the servants, old and reliable," Barlow interpolated. "Mrs. Endicott, the girl's mother, and Professor Endicott's own daughter, Caroline Endicott, newly arrived from England."

"Ah, yes, I recall her." Mitchell took several steps down the corridor. "Miss Endicott was the last per-

son to see Mrs. Langhorne alive, I believe. Come back this evening, Barlow," and he hurried away.

As Mitchell gained the west entrance of the Municipal Building he was passed by Miss Holt; he cast a preoccupied glance at the heavily veiled woman and continued out of the building. Barlow had supplied the trained nurse with explicit directions where to find him, and she wasted no time in reaching the inspector's office. The little detective sprang up at her entrance and welcomed her cordially.

"What news?" he inquired eagerly. "There must be some or I take it you would not be here."

"Quite true; however"— Miss Holt's pleasant voice held a troubled note and Barlow looked at her with added interest; his association with her in the past had convinced him that she not only possessed ability, but a conscientious dislike of gossip. "I am in some doubt as to the value of my news; frankly, Mr. Barlow, I'm puzzled."

"Yes?" he prompted eagerly, as she paused again.

"Did you have a talk with Nurse Nana?" Observing his blank expression, she added, "Miss Caroline Endicott's old nurse who accompanied her here from England; ah, then you were not told that she was stopping at the Endicotts?"

"First I've heard of it," he admitted. "She wasn't around when I interviewed the other servants."

"Nana had a bilious attack Monday and was in

bed most of the time thereafter," explained Miss Holt. "On Tuesday afternoon Miss Caroline came to me and asked that I see Nana, as she thought her very feverish, so I went up to the Englishwoman's room on the third floor. Nana was in the bathroom."

"Ill?" asked the detective.

"Not then; she was cleaning a slipper." Miss Holt took from her bag a soiled guest towel; the Chinese embroidery at the ends was almost concealed under the streaks of red clay and mortar. "Where have you seen mud like that, Mr. Barlow?"

Barlow examined the towel with care, then looked up at her. "In Normanstone Drive," he said, "there's a dump of old mortar, left by some contractor building one of the houses in the vicinity."

"Yes; I've passed it in my walks," replied Miss Holt. "The mortar is almost in a direct line between the Endicott mansion and the death car."

For a moment they sat looking at each other, then Barlow pushed back his chair, preparatory to rising. "Suppose I return with you and see Nurse Nana—"

"Then the fat would be in the fire," she retorted quickly. "I don't want it known that I am working with you; secondly, Nurse Nana left yesterday for England."

Barlow leaned back in his chair and whistled. "Was her departure unexpected?"

"To me it was, for she had made no mention of

leaving; she didn't come near Mrs. Endicott to say good-by, and she left the house when the professor and his daughter were at Mrs. Langhorne's funeral." Miss Holt laid the towel on the inspector's desk and then shut her handbag with a snap. "I presume you would like to keep that?"

"Thanks, I would. What manner of woman was this nurse?"

"A typical Englishwoman of the servant class; kindly, not overbright." Miss Holt readjusted her veil. "And devoted to Miss Caroline."

"Just a moment," as Miss Holt rose. "To whom did the soiled slipper belong? To the nurse?"

"No," she hesitated. "Last night when helping her to bed, I found its mate in Caroline Endicott's closet."

Barlow sprang up and took several turns about the office; he was too excited to keep still.

"By Jove, that's news!" he exclaimed. "But I don't just see—"

Miss Holt watched him in silence as he resumed his nervous pacing back and forth; she felt a pleasurable thrill that she had imparted news which evidently the detective considered of importance. For a moment she paused in thought; should she divulge another discovery, or wait until she had further opportunity to verify her theories?

"What is it, Miss Holt?" Barlow had stopped be-

fore her and was eyeing her keenly. "What are you keeping up your sleeve?"

Miss Holt colored and her eyes behind her heavy lenses held a glint of admiration as she looked at the little man.

"Have you found the weapon used to kill Mrs. Langhorne?" she asked; then, as he shook his head, "Did the nature of the wound give you an idea of what was used?"

"Yes; she was undoubtedly stabbed with a sharp-edged, pointed knife. Why do you ask?" moving closer.

The trained nurse lowered her voice. "As I came down the hall late last night, I met Miss Caroline Endicott and stopped to speak to her. On my approach I observed that she had slipped one hand behind her and kept it there until I left. But," Miss Holt paused; "Caroline evidently did not realize that she stood in front of the hall mirror. Reflected in it, I distinctly saw that she held a dagger in her hand."

CHAPTER IX

A NEWS ITEM

THE sunlight falling over Caroline Endicott's shoulder was obscured and the printed type of the newspaper blurred thereby.

"Go lie down, Zeto," she ordered without looking up, and continued her reading, quite unaware that Barry Langhorne, and not the Airedale, was responsible for the partial obliteration of the light. The hassock on which she crouched was decidedly uncomfortable, but the contents of the printed page was sufficiently interesting to dwarf all physical sensations.

At the angle Caroline was holding the paper, Langhorne was also able to decipher the news and as he read on his cheeks flushed and his eyes flashed.

"Carl Ashby, the eminent portrait painter, has reopened his attractive bungalow in Massachusetts Park," so stated the text of the paragraph. "His unexpected return from abroad has given fresh credence to the rumor of his approaching marriage with Mrs. John A. Hamilton, widow of the well-known banker, to whom Mr. Ashby was reported engaged a month ago. When questioned this evening by a representative of the *Argosy*, both Mrs. Hamilton and Mr. Ashby refused either to affirm or deny the report."

Caroline looked up as the smell of tobacco from Langhorne's half-smoked cigar reached her.

"Good gracious, where did you come from?" she asked, her head screwed over her shoulder.

"I might ask the same question," he retorted. "Where were you at breakfast?"

"I didn't want any breakfast—"

"At your age?" Langhorne smiled involuntarily. "I would as soon think of a puppy declining food."

"Thanks for the comparison." Caroline's offended tone deepened his smile; it vanished utterly as he obtained a better view of her.

"You look quite pale," he ejaculated. "Is anything the matter?"

"I—I didn't sleep very well," evasively; suddenly she plucked up her courage. "Mr. Lagnhorne, who is this Carl Ashby?" laying her finger on the boxed story she and Langhorne had both been reading.

"A portrait painter; an 'eminent' one, to quote your *Argosy*," he replied, and the bitter irony in his voice was unmistakable. "That's his work over there," and he pointed across the living room. On the south wall hung a large portrait, done in oils, of Mrs. Endicott. "It is considered an excellent likeness."

Caroline regarded the portrait and then her companion, while with restless fingers she folded and unfolded the newspaper. "And why do you hate him?" she asked, her voice almost a whisper.

"I? My dear child"—his laugh was quite steady, but suddenly he flung his cigar into the fireplace, his gesture one of loathing. "Ashby isn't any one you want to know," he exploded vehemently, meeting her gaze fully for the first time.

"I thought him—very attractive."

"You thought?" swiftly, bending closer. "Why, where have you met him?"

She shook her head. "We've never met," she answered simply. "Was he a great friend of Mary's?"

Without answering Langhorne propped his chin on his hand and, resting his elbow on the table against which he leaned, with chair slightly tipped, stared at Caroline long and intently.

"They were friends, certainly, witness her mother's portrait, painted by Ashby," he said slowly. "But tell me, please, what prompts the question?"

The girl plucked nervously at her black gown; it covered a rapidly beating heart. What was there about Barry Langhorne that stirred her out of herself?

"Ashby," she began confusedly. "That is, Mr. Ashby was the first to find Mary dead in the taxi. I wonder if the police have ever questioned him about the—the missing carpet from the car, or anything," lamely, her eyes shifting under his steadfast gaze.

The ticking of the clock was distinctly audible in the ensuing silence.

"A point well taken," said Langhorne finally; "suppose we ask—Mr. Ashby."

"We?" Caroline was on her feet also, her eyes twice their usual size. "We?"

"Just so," composedly. "I take it that you are equally interested in discovering who killed Mary. Suppose we walk over to Ashby's bungalow now." And taking her consent for granted he held back the portières so that she might precede him into the broad central hall.

Her coat and hat and gloves were lying on a chair, where she had left them upon returning with Zeto an hour before; a low whistle brought the dog back from the pantry where he had gone in search of a possible bone which Pierre frequently secreted there for him, then turning about she joined Langhorne on the portico steps. As they started along the walk which skirted the mansion, with Zeto frisking about them, they came face to face with Miss Holt. She could have passed them with a briefly spoken word, but Langhorne, catching her name as Caroline mentioned it in greeting, halted with the unmistakable intention of addressing her.

"How is Mrs. Endicott?" he asked and the gravity of his manner impressed Miss Holt.

"She had a bad night, sir; so much so that Dr. McLane engaged a day nurse." Miss Holt shifted

about so that the sun did not shine directly in her eyes. "Mrs. Mason is with her now."

Langhorne swung his walking stick from one hand to the other.

"Can I see Mrs. Endicott for a few minutes this afternoon?" he asked.

"Oh, no; we are keeping her under opiates," and noticing Caroline's startled concern, Miss Holt added hastily, "as soon as the pain abates Mrs. Endicott will be much better; she had three teeth pulled yesterday; they were badly infected and the poison has gotten through her system."

Langhorne stared after the nurse's retreating figure for a second or two before following Caroline along the winding walk.

"If I didn't know McLane for a capable physician, I'd think he was nutty, putting two nurses on such a case," he said, catching up with her as they left the walk and entered the wood bordering Massachusetts Park. "Having three teeth extracted doesn't usually require such attention afterward. What's your opinion of Mrs. Endicott's condition?"

Caroline almost jumped at the abruptly put question. "I haven't seen her, not since Mary's death," she admitted. "I, well, I've found I'm a bit superfluous about the house," summoning up a wintry smile. "Zeto and I amuse each other."

Langhorne swung his cane viciously at the under-

brush as they went down the hillside toward Normanstone Drive; he gathered something of her heartache in the wistful look in Caroline's lovely eyes, of which she was entirely unconscious; the girl must be very lonely. What was her father thinking of to neglect her so shamefully?

"Were you and Mary chums?" he asked, as she paused to see if Zeto was following them.

"We only met on my arrival in Washington," she answered simply. "Your wife," with a swiftly timid look upward, "was very kind, very sweet in her welcome to me."

"And you were together all the time?" he persisted. "You became her confidante?"

Caroline smiled somewhat sadly. "We were good friends, nothing more." She laid her hand on Zeto as the dog bounded to her side. "I imagine Mary was reserved by nature. But," with a faint twinkle in her eyes, "what nonsense to try to tell you something you must already know about her."

Langhorne helped her across the wide and muddy gutter and they turned north on Normanstone Drive.

"Silly of me to have brought you this way," he exclaimed. "We should have taken the upper road; however, if I remember correctly, Ashby's bungalow is in this general direction."

Walking briskly they continued on their way. To

Caroline's relief the ill-fated Cadillac had been removed. She looked curiously toward the spot where it had been parked and wondered inwardly if the silent man beside her had visited the scene of his wife's death while the taxi was still there. Singular that he never alluded to her as "my wife," but always as "Mary!"

Caroline was quite unconscious of the lengthening silence as they tramped along; her thoughts had gone back to her father. Except for a fleeting glimpse of him as he entered his limousine to be driven down town, she had not seen him. Learning from Pierre that no one was expected for luncheon, she had coaxed the butler to bring her a well-laden tray, and she had eaten a combination breakfast-luncheon, her appetite having asserted itself in spite of her splitting headache and feeling of nausea.

Could it be that Professor Endicott had purposely left the house early to avoid seeing her? He had never sent to ask nor had he come up to inquire how she was when she had notified Pierre that she did not feel well enough to go downstairs for breakfast. Langhorne's voice brought her thoughts back to the present with a jump.

"You had better call Zeto," he suggested, and looking down the hill she saw the Airedale still nosing over the ground where the taxi had been parked. Her shrill whistle brought him bounding after them and

at a word from her, he remained at her heels for the remainder of the walk to their destination.

The bungalow, as Langhorne had called it, looked even more attractive in the bright afternoon sunshine than it had previously and Caroline stared eagerly about the place. The little formal garden, with its carefully trimmed box and sundial gave her a homesick throb for England. The blinds were raised and the place had an air of habitation, but ring as Langhorne did, first the front doorbell and then that at the side entrance, no one came to answer the summons.

Cupping her hands and pressing her face against the pane of one of the long French windows facing north, Caroline was able dimly to make out some of the objects in the room which ran the depth of the house; apparently it was used as a studio, for she saw an easel in one corner and other painting paraphernalia lying around. Except for its furnishings the room appeared empty.

"There's nobody at home," announced Langhorne, rejoining her after his fruitless effort to gain entrance at the side door. "And it's too cold to hang around outside," observing that she still loitered by the window. "There's no telling at what hour Ashby will return. I'm sorry to have brought you out on a vain errand."

"I've enjoyed the walk"— Caroline smothered her disappointment; she had prayed that an interview with

Carl Ashby would furnish her with a clue, no matter how vague, to a solution of the murder; the fact that he had been the first to discover the dead girl, his unexplained presence in Mary's bedroom Tuesday night; his unmistakably bitter anguish—Caroline's conviction was growing stronger every moment that Carl Ashby might hold the key to the murder. Oh, if it was so and her father not involved!

She drew a long, long breath and, looking around with sparkling eyes, glanced at her companion. They were returning by the upper road and a disconsolate Zeto followed just behind them; he had anticipated a long run in the country and to go back to his quarters in the garage so soon made him assume a dejected air, completely lost on Caroline, however.

"Do you know, Mr. Langhorne, you puzzle me," she stated frankly.

"How?" looking at her with interest.

"Are you always inconsistent?" she questioned softly. "First you state that Carl Ashby is not a desirable acquaintance for me and then you immediately take me to his house."

A dark flush stained Langhorne's cheeks almost to his brow, then receded suddenly, leaving him quite white.

"You would have come to no harm," he said; his tone more than the words caught her attention, but

both puzzled her. "However—don't go there unchaperoned."

It was Caroline's turn to color and she did so—hotly.

A sedan drove up at the curb and came to an abrupt stop.

"Hello, well met!" called Fred Brent. "I was hoping to find you at the Endicotts', Barry; here's a telegram that came in my care. How are you, Miss Caroline? I called up and Miss Holt told me that you weren't feeling well."

"I'm all right now; the fresh air has done me good." She threw back her head and drew in a deep breath. "I could walk for hours."

"I'm sorry I shall have to leave you," broke in Langhorne. "This wire requires an immediate reply."

"I'll drive you both to the telegraph office," volunteered Brent cheerfully. "Hop in, Miss Caroline."

She hesitated even as the men opened both doors of the sedan. "I'd go, but there's Zeto—" Before she had completed her sentence Zeto was comfortably seated in the back of the car and with an amused chuckle Langhorne climbed in beside him as Brent made room for Caroline on the front seat.

Already in her short stay in Washington, Caroline had grown to love the National Capital and welcomed every opportunity to view its broad avenues and handsome residences as well as the imposing public

buildings. By the time they reached the down-town section the four-thirty office crowd was surging northward and the streets were filled with vehicles of every description, making driving over eighteen miles an hour an impossibility.

"I hope you are not in a hurry," remarked Brent, breaking off his animated conversation with Caroline to bestow a glance on his silent passenger on the back seat. Langhorne sat with one arm around Zeto, who had climbed in his lap and sat contentedly with his great, intelligent eyes fixed steadfastly on Caroline, every now and then rubbing his head against Langhorne's shoulder.

"Why didn't you stop at an uptown branch?" inquired Langhorne, pulling Zeto's ear gently.

"Telegrams go quicker from the main office," was Brent's glib reply; he did not wish to admit the real reason even to himself—that the prospect of having Caroline with him had made him prolong the drive. Each time he caught her eyes and her friendly smile his pulses throbbed with unusual rapidity.

As he approached the Western Union office a man pulled away from the curb and Brent slipped into the vacancy, much to the wrath of another driver, who had designs on the same parking space.

"Pure luck," declared Brent. "Stay as long as you like, Barry," and he turned again to claim Caroline's attention.

But while she listened to the reporter's inconsequent chatter, Caroline's eyes were following Barry Langhorne's tall figure as he made his way across the pavement and through the throng of hurrying pedestrians. As he disappeared inside the door of the telegraph office, she turned impulsively to Brent.

"Why does Mr. Langhorne hate Carl Ashby?" she asked.

Brent gazed at her, astounded.

"Hate Carl Ashby?" he repeated. "Barry hate him? Oh, no, you are 'way off, Miss Caroline; why, Barry and Carl are devoted friends—they were roommates at college."

CHAPTER X

THE BOOKMARK

PROFESSOR ENDICOTT pulled down the chains of the reading lamp and the side brackets until the bedroom was fully illuminated. All that evening he had shown a marked preference for a well-lighted room, even going so far as to reprimand Pierre for serving dinner in a dim somberness which Caroline as well found trying to the nerves. The moment the meal was over, Endicott had limped upstairs without a word to his daughter or Barry Langhorne. Earlier in the day he had insisted upon Miss Holt dining with them, and her presence at the table had been welcomed by Caroline; the trained nurse was some one to talk to who didn't arouse tragic thoughts.

As the lights flared up, Mrs. Endicott stirred restlessly on her pillows and opened her eyes.

"Turn them off," she exclaimed with the petulance of the sick. "Oh, turn them off."

"Hush, dear; I will, but I want a good look at you—"

It was an unfortunate remark. Mrs. Endicott threw up her arm until her face was partly hidden; her vanity was touched.

"My hair hasn't been combed," she moaned. "And the light hurts my eyes. I won't have that glare in my face, Charles; do instantly what I wish, or I'll get up"—and she flung back the eiderdown quilt.

Endicott, somewhat startled by her outburst, hastily turned out the side lights, but it wasn't until he had switched off all but one lamp that his wife uncovered her face.

"It's still swollen," she explained, "and sore to the touch," softly stroking her jaw. "Oh, everything hurts, Charles!" and she commenced to cry weakly.

"My dear—" Endicott stroked her hand with a tenderness very foreign to him. "You have been through a great deal, and none realizes it more than I." His voice softened until Caroline would never have recognized it. "I am here to help you."

She looked up at him through eyes and lids swollen with much weeping.

"Charles;" her voice was a faint whisper. "You won't forget me in other interests?"

"No, my dearest, never." For several seconds husband and wife clung to each other without speaking. Suddenly she reached up and ran her fingers over his thick, gray hair, smoothing it back off his forehead and both smiled at the old familiar gesture.

"Everything grows unruly without you at the head of affairs," he murmured tenderly. "We want you up and about, Martha, your dear, helpful self."

She sat up in bed and kissed him fondly. "Where's Miss Holt?" she asked as she settled back among her pillows.

"Downstairs with Caroline; I said I would call her later." Endicott sat on the edge of the bed and gently massaged her hand between both of his. "Miss Holt declares you are much better."

His wife nodded absently. "I'm stronger," she admitted languidly, then her expression altered. "Who are in the house with us besides the servants?"

"Caroline."

"And that nurse of hers, Nana?" as he paused, glancing uneasily behind him.

"No, she has returned to England."

"Ah, so you got rid of her; good!" Mrs. Endicott withdrew her hand to pass her handkerchief across her lips. "The dog, Zeto, is he in the house at night?"

"No." Endicott rose. He was anxious not to overstay the ten minutes Miss Holt had set as the limit for their interview. "Is there anything, Martha, that I can bring or send you?"

She sighed wearily. "Nothing; except—" Her eyes swept over him as he leaned anxiously above her. "Take care of yourself, dear; there are only two of us now." Her voice shook with feeling and she stumbled in her speech. "You look very, very tired; promise me not to stay up late to-night—promise."

"Certainly, Martha." He smiled reassuringly and

bent down and kissed her, then with his wife's endearing words ringing in his ears he went downstairs.

For a few seconds he wandered aimlessly up and down the central hall, pausing at last to listen to the sound of subdued voices coming from the living room; they drew nearer and Miss Holt came into the hall, followed by Barry Langhorne. The trained nurse looked reproachfully at Endicott as she hurried up the stairs.

"You didn't call me as you promised," she said, observing that the professor signed to her to wait. "Your wife must not be left alone."

"Why not?" questioned Langhorne swiftly, and Miss Holt stopped halfway up the stairs and looked down at him.

"Mrs. Endicott will persist in getting out of bed," she explained, "and she is too weak to stand without assistance."

The two men watched Miss Holt out of sight.

"An interesting woman and, I imagine, a capable nurse." Langhorne's tone was perfunctory. "In our talk just now she seemed well informed on many subjects. Will you have a cigar, Professor?"

But Endicott waved aside the proffered weed. "Thanks; I prefer a pipe." He drew it from his pocket with a tobacco pouch and stood fingering them absently. "Where is Caroline?" he inquired abruptly.

Langhorne looked around. "She said she wanted

to be sure Zeto was comfortable for the night, but I thought that she had returned; I heard the front door open and close about five minutes ago." He picked up his hat from the hall table. "I'll go after her."

"Oh, no; she's all right." Endicott spoke with marked impatience. "Suppose we go into the living room, Barry; there are several matters we must discuss," and brooking no refusal, the professor laid his hand on Langhorne's shoulder and walked with him into the next room. But once there he seemed loath to speak.

"Sit down," he suggested; "no, not that chair; it isn't comfortable." He pulled his seat over to the open fire burning on the hearth and dropped heavily into it.

Langhorne, considerably puzzled by the other's manner, drew up the most comfortable chair he could find and, sitting back, proceeded to enjoy his cigar. For a few minutes he studied the silent man facing him, and then his gaze roved over the room. Mrs. Endicott had used excellent taste in its modern furnishings, but to Langhorne there was something lacking, a sense of warmth, perhaps, such as old furniture brings, and softly tinted Oriental rugs with their perfect blending of colors; coldly formal, the room breathed no intimate and spontaneous hospitality.

Putting back the box of matches on the smoking-

stand at his elbow, Professor Endicott turned to his guest.

"Barry"—he was manifestly nervous, drumming his fingers up and down the arm of his chair—"you and I have never had an opportunity to talk over your runaway marriage with my stepdaughter."

Langhorne stiffened in his chair. "Nor is there any occasion to discuss it now—"

"Please don't take that attitude." There was no mistaking the professor's seriousness and Langhorne lapsed into silence. "In the light of subsequent events, it must be discussed and I am obliged to inquire why Mary left you and returned to her mother."

For long seconds Langhorne studied his polished finger nails. "That," he said finally, "I consider nobody's business."

Professor Endicott gnawed at his long mustache. "Why?"

Langhorne's reply was slow in coming. "If Mary had wished it known, she would have told you," he pointed out. "I keep faith with her."

The devil's tattoo which Endicott beat absently on the arms of his chair alone broke the stillness; the noise ceased as suddenly as it had commenced and he whirled on Langhorne, his eyes blazing.

"You insinuate something discreditable to Mary," he thundered. "Damn you, I'll not stand for it!"

Langhorne was on his feet, his face livid; then as

his eyes fell on the smaller man and he saw the lines of care and sorrow which furrowed Endicott's countenance, he checked his furious retort; after all the professor was his senior and broken in health.

"When you stop to consider, you will withdraw your words," he said tolerantly. "What you have been through distorts your viewpoint. Mary and I would have—have"—he faltered a second—"have made up our quarrel had she lived."

"Ah," Endicott caught him up swiftly, "but Mary didn't live and the police are looking for the motive inspiring her death." He sat looking up at Langhorne under beetling brows, his eyes mere pin points. "And that motive may be found—in your silence."

"If it gives you any pleasure to think that, why, all right." Langhorne shrugged his shoulders as he resumed his seat. "I understand Mary was not of age; was Mrs. Endicott her only legal guardian?"

The question took Endicott by surprise, judging by the start he gave. "Yes," he said ungraciously; he stared at his companion. "But to get the marriage license you lied as to her age."

Langhorne tossed his unfinished cigar into the fire. "Freddy Brent procured it for us," he explained. "Now that I know your sentiments toward me, I had better leave; you will feel more comfortable not having me under your roof."

"Stay!" The briefly uttered word reached Lang-

horne as he strode toward the hall and he half turned to face the professor. "Your leaving here will but create more talk," went on the latter, raising his voice to make sure that Langhorne should hear him distinctly. "There's nothing to be gained by that. Come back."

With reluctant footsteps Langhorne recrossed the room. "But to be an unwelcome guest—"

"You never questioned being an unwelcome son-in-law." The shaft was tipped with venom, but as he caught Langhorne's blazing wrath, Endicott realized he had gone too far, and he rose hastily.

"My boy, I spoke without thought and—unjustly" —his voice was charged with unwonted feeling. "I've lived through torment—forgive me."

A certain quality in Endicott's tone, a look in his eyes—a flash of family resemblance, gone the next instant, but in that time Langhorne had glimpsed a vision of Caroline—Caroline and her fresh unspoiled loveliness. What a contrast to the wreck of a man before him! The bitter retort upon Langhorne's lips died unspoken.

"We are both unhinged, Professor," he answered, somewhat shakily. "Had I followed the dictates of reason, this tragedy would never have occurred."

"Do you refer to your wife's death, Senator Langhorne?" questioned a voice behind them, and looking

around they found Detective Barlow just entering the room. "If so, sir, would you mind explaining your words?"

Langhorne regarded the detective attentively; how much had he overheard?

"In a general way, yes," he responded. "After a tragic event we can always see some way it might have been prevented. I should have been here to guard Mrs. Langhorne—"

"Against whom?"

"The maniac who killed her." His eyes never shifted before Barlow's penetrating gaze. "To think it was the act of a sane person is to prove evil intent, and Mary was not hated, but beloved—"

"By whom?"

"By all who really knew her"—smoothly, but only by an effort which shook his self-control was Langhorne able to keep his hands off the smiling detective. Barlow drew a step closer.

"Have you read the evening paper?" he asked, and as Langhorne shook his head, "There's a clamor starting for Page's release."

"Page, the taxi driver? Is that so?" Langhorne thrust his hands in his pockets. "Has he been examined by an alienist?"

"No." Barlow buttoned his overcoat, which he had loosened but had not removed when admitted by Pierre. "Do you know Page?"

Again Langhorne shook his head. "Never heard of him until—until Mary was found in his car."

"Then suppose you come to Headquarters with me, sir; there's just a chance you might be able to identify him; we are not altogether sure he isn't using an alias." He turned to Professor Endicott. "Will you come with us?"

"Not to-night." Endicott drew out his key ring and with some difficulty extracted one from it. "Here's the latchkey, Barry; Pierre is spending the night in Alexandria with a friend and I want to retire early."

"Thanks;" but there was an appreciable pause before Langhorne took the key. "I don't expect to be late; see you in the morning, Professor. Come on, Barlow," and the two men left the room.

The professor stood where he was until he heard the front door close with a resounding bang; then walked stiffly over to the fireplace. After replenishing the wood until it blazed up anew, he resumed his seat and, putting fresh tobacco in his pipe, leaned back in his chair, lost in reflection.

Through the circling tobacco smoke, which had grown quite dense as he puffed continuously at the pipe, Endicott became gradually aware that some one was regarding him. Brushing the smoke from before his eyes and rubbing them fully open, he saw Caroline sitting on a hassock close to the fire.

"I must have been dozing!" he exclaimed. "I didn't

hear you come in," then as she made no comment, he asked querulously: "Why do you sit and look at me like that?"

"A cat may look at a king," she quoted, at a loss what to say; she had hoped to find her father in a pleasant humor, but her heart sank at his gruff tones. Plucking up courage she slid the hassock a degree nearer his chair. "I have a favor to ask of you, Dad."

"Well?" as she hesitated. "Is it about that beastly dog?"

"No, not this time," with a ghost of a smile. "Will you give me my passage money home?"

If she had boxed his ears, her father could not have appeared more thunderstruck.

"You are home," he announced loudly. "What nonsense are you talking?"

"No nonsense," sadly. "I'm not wanted here, I realize that—"

"Don't be an idiot!" The professor laid down his pipe, the hot bowl scorching his fingers. "You have everything you need—clothes, food—"

"But no affection!"

"Every care and attention," he went on, not heeding her interruption; he was also careful not to look at her. "I don't believe in pampering girls; look at the effect on Mary; her mother spoiled her utterly, hopelessly. She grew up headstrong, selfish."

Caroline, aghast at the torrent of words, broke in,

hoping to stem the tide. "I thought Mary very winsome, gentle—"

"Gentle? Bah! So's a kitten until it shows its claws!" Never in their brief intercourse had she seen her father so aroused; it was as if he had been forced by overwhelming emotion to give vent at last to the feeling stored up within him. "'Mary, Mary, quite contrary,' good Lord, that was she! If her mother told her to wear white, she put on black."

"Hush, Dad; she's dead!"

Her father swallowed hard as he leaned back in his seat; he looked as he felt, exhausted.

"You can't return to England, and that's flat," he mumbled.

"You sent Nana back."

"Certainly; the old nurse was arousing discord among the other servants." He stood up to signify that the interview was over, but Caroline did not budge from the hassock. "You will get over your homesick feeling for England shortly; we are not any of us normal now."

Caroline stared up at him, half blinded by tears. "I'm not abnormal," she protested hotly. "It's you" —she stopped, unable to go on, as the scene of the night before recurred to her. His attempt at suicide indicated a dangerous mental state which their present argument might aggravate.

"Perhaps if I got out of doors more, I'd feel better,"

she suggested, as he remained where he was, gazing into the fire.

"You mean you wish diversion?" he asked heavily.

"No, that is, yes"—in truthful candor. "Let me have Mary's sport roadster, please, Dad."

He frowned, in manifest displeasure. "You don't know how to drive an American car."

"Thomas can teach me—"

"The car's in the shop."

"Why, it wasn't to-night."

Endicott pocketed his pipe and tobacco pouch. "Then it will be taken there to-morrow, for the car needs repairs," he stated, with finality. "Perhaps," in attempted playfulness, "I'll get another for you. Come to bed now," and stooping down he kissed her cheek awkwardly.

"I want to finish this chapter," Caroline held up the book lying in her lap. "It's colder upstairs, so I'll read here for a little longer."

"All right, but make it brief," he directed, and without a backward glance her father left her sitting where she was. Suddenly an involuntary shiver ran down her spine and she moved her hassock as close as she dared to the fire, turning on a bridge lamp so that its rays would fall on her book.

Caroline sat for some time, however, without opening its pages, content to stare at the red embers burning on the hearth. The warmth of the fire, while it soothed

her, did not distract her thoughts, and in desperation she turned to her book. But always in front of the printed sheet there danced a mental picture of her father, of Mary and of Barry Langhorne. Her father's petulant outburst against Mary had taken her completely by surprise, but not more so than Freddy Brent's statement that Carl Ashby and Barry were intimate friends.

Feverishly Caroline turned the pages of her book, reading only the dialogue and skipping the long descriptions; finally she came to a more dramatic portion and her interest was held in spite of everything. The fire had died down to a mere handful of hot ashes when she next looked up.

There remained several more chapters to be read before she completed the book, but the chilliness of the room decided her to postpone their perusal until another time. Leaning over to warm her cold hands before the feeble blaze, she accidentally dropped the book out of her lap and in picking it up she noticed that her paper mark had fallen out. She retrieved it also and opened the book at random and slipped it inside, but in so doing her attention was attracted by three tiny letters printed on the white paper—P.P.C.

Caroline picked up the paper and turned it over; it was not a visiting card, and the three letters were the only writing on it. She wrinkled her brow in thought. Where had the paper come from? It was not large

and had evidently been folded twice lengthwise and then across at each end. From its size and shape it resembled papers folded to hold powders, but how had it come in her book? She twisted the paper about in her fingers; ah! she had it—it was the same paper she picked up off her pillow the night before and used as a bookmark. But how had such a paper gotten on her pillow and why were the letters, P.P.C., written on it?

She was too cold to spend more time there thinking about it, and replacing the paper as a bookmark, she carefully closed the volume and putting out the lights, sought her bedroom.

Caroline was always light on her feet and reaching the second floor she took extra precautions not to make a sound for fear of waking the sleeping household. To one side of the long, unlighted hall was an alcove and as she passed it she turned her head. Out of the surrounding darkness two eyes stared back at her.

Having a natural antipathy to cats, Caroline instinctively gave voice to her startled feelings.

"Shoo!" she exclaimed with vigor; as the yellow-green eyes continued to regard her, she took several steps toward the alcove, then stopped. Was it only her horror of cats that was causing her to break out into a cold perspiration and her heart to hammer against her ribs?

The eyes were fully three or four feet above the ground; but there was a high chair in the alcove, that

she knew, for she had sat on it that afternoon. In the impenetrable blackness she could not make out the body of the animal, but the eyes—

Suddenly, unable to check her unreasoning panic, Caroline ran to her room, and with cold and trembling fingers, locked and barricaded her door.

CHAPTER XI

CAUGHT ON THE WIRES

THE heavy door of the District Jail closed behind Ernest Page with a resounding bang and the noise was music in his ears as he walked up the street, a free man once more. Even the sunshine tempered the cold and his old sweater felt reasonably comfortable in spite of the March wind. It was a long tramp from Nineteenth and C Streets, Southeast to the Municipal Building, but Page, counting his small amount of change, returned the money to his pocket and strode along.

Detective Barlow greeted his appearance at Police Headquarters with surprise.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed. "You are the last chap I expected to see here—so soon!"

Page caught the significance of the two final words and grinned back at Barlow.

"I likes to 'sprise folks," he admitted genially. "But, say, you knew I was comin' anyway."

Barlow laughed as he pointed to a chair. "Come to tell us who stabbed Mrs. Langhorne? No?" as the taxi driver shook his head glumly. "Then have you

found out the name of your mysterious passenger on Monday night and how Mrs. Langhorne's body got in your car in his place?"

"Nope, I ain't found out none of them things." Page was not to be shaken out of his good humor.

"Say, mister, was the guy with you last night, givin' me the once over, Senator Barry Langhorne, him that lives out Westminster way?"

"I believe the Senator does hail from that part of Maryland." The detective reached for a copy of the Congressional Record, on the shelf where reposed a *Who's Who,* other books of reference and a Telephone Directory. Flipping back the pages he soon came to the biography he wished and skimmed down the paragraphs, reading them aloud in jerky sentences.

"Langhorne, Barry, only son, thirty-six, unmarried"—he read disjointedly, skipping several lines. "Served as major, air service, A.E.F., July, 1917-November, 1918—Decorations, Croix de Guerre, British Military Cross, Belgian Cross of War, the Distinguished Service Cross of this country. Appointed by Governor to 69th Congress to fill vacancy caused by death of—Home: Idlewilde, Westminster, Maryland."

" 'Idlewilde,' " repeated Page, reflectively. "That's the name—kinder suited him as a kid—wild an' lazy he was then."

"Ah, so you know the Langhornes!" Barlow's eyes

sparkled in triumph. His visit to the jail with Barry would not be barren of results in spite of the Senator's statement that Page was unknown to him.

"Know 'em?" The taxi driver was guilty of a half sneering grunt. "The likes of me don't know 'em, leastways not in that part of the country; I was jest a field hand on a farm thereabouts. Where does Senator Langhorne hang out in this city?"

"He is stopping with his father-in-law, Professor Endicott." The detective returned the Congressional Record to its place on the bookshelf. "Why do you wish to see him?"

"He's a lawyer, ain't he?"

"Yes, but he doesn't practice now." Barlow settled back in his chair. "Do you think you will need a lawyer?"

"Maybe; if you fellers don't learn sense," and Page's jeering laugh stained the detective's cheeks an angry red. "Keepin' me locked up all this time an' the murderer of that po' lady goin' scot free! No wonder the papers poke fun at ye"—displaying the noon edition which he had appropriated in the warden's office before leaving the jail. "Say, Mr. Barlow, where hev' ye put my ol' bus? Ye haven't left it in Massachusetts Park all this time, hev' ye?"

Barlow shook his head. "No, we've taken care of the car. But you can't have it," as Page rose eagerly to his feet.

"Why not?" belligerently.

"We may need it for evidence," evasively.

Page eyed him with concern. "Ye mean ye're goin' to keep my car!" he exploded. "Why, man, how do ye think I'm goin' to live? I drives that ol' bus for hire!"

"How many people will want to ride in a death car?" questioned Barlow swiftly, and Page winced.

"I'll fix it up so they'll never recognize the ol' boat," he retorted doggedly.

"Interesting," commented Barlow, dryly. "But you can't have your car now, Page. Buck up," noting the shadow which passed over his none too clean countenance. "A man of your talents won't be long out of a job."

"What d'ye know about my talents?" suspiciously.

"Nothing," with a bland smile which increased Page's irritation considerably. "Why not ask Senator Langhorne to help you out with legal advice?"

"I'll sure find out if ye can hold my car." His retort was hot as he turned to leave, but at the door he paused and came slowly back to the desk behind which Barlow was watching him in speculative silence. "Let me have that silver flask, will ye, the one I got off my passenger Monday night?"

"What do you want with the flask?" asked Barlow, leaning forward in his interest.

"Maybe I'll pawn it." Page held out his hand across the desk. "Come on, give it to me."

"Not I!" Barlow was watching him keenly; it behooved him to find out the cause of the alteration in Page; twenty-four hours before he had almost cringed in the presence of the detective. What had given him his self-assertive assurance? "That piece of evidence has been turned over to the proper authorities. Remember, Page, the inquest is only postponed, and after that comes the grand jury."

The taxi driver shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

"Ye've given me a rotten deal," he protested. "Well, I guess I'll go see the feller higher up—yer boss!" and satisfied with the threat he beat a quick retreat. His search for Inspector Mitchell proving futile, Page went slowly out of the building and started across Pennsylvania Avenue.

From his office window Barlow watched his progress and nodded in satisfaction at sight of an unobtrusive figure which detached itself from other hurrying pedestrians and followed in Page's wake. His shadow was on the job.

At the same hour, Pierre, summoned to the sun parlor by the imperative ringing of that bell, closed the front door and hastened to answer the second ring.

"Pardon, M'sieur, I thought nobody waz home," he explained. "Ze front bell, she ring, and zen you."

Professor Endicott straightened the papers on his desk, covered several with an elastic band and slipped them inside his pocket.

"Help me on with this overcoat, Pierre," he directed, "and, eh, Pierre—"

"Oui, M'sieu." The little butler used considerable strength in pushing the fur-lined, heavy overcoat on Endicott's bent form.

"Where did the cat come from that was in the house last night?"

"Ze cat, M'sieu?" in tones of unbounded astonishment. "What cat?"

"I don't know," testily. "Miss Caroline at breakfast spoke of seeing a cat in the hall on her way to bed. I don't wish any cats in the house, Pierre, or about the place. Go down to the nearest grocery store and buy a package of Ruff-on-Rats." Noting the butler's bewildered expression, he paused and wrote the name down on a scratch pad. "Here," tearing off the sheet, "show this to the clerk, and when you get the poison, Pierre, scatter it around."

The Frenchman carried the paper clutched tightly in his hand until he had ushered Endicott into his waiting limousine.

"But, please, M'sieu—" Pierre held tightly to the car door and leaned inside. "Zis poison, suppose Zeto eat it, too?"

Endicott leaned back and drew the heavy robe over

his knees; he felt the need of warmth as the cold air circled through the open door.

"Very well, sprinkle the poison only in the house; Zeto isn't there—much. Drive on, Thomas," and the powerful car swung down the driveway, leaving a much-perturbed Frenchman standing on the steps of the *porte cochère*.

Twenty or more blocks away, Freddy Brent, in his sedan, was just making the turn into Connecticut Avenue with a partial attention to possible pedestrians and a full concentration on what his passenger was saying.

"I don't blame you for being scared, Miss Caroline," he announced sympathetically. "How did the cat get in the house?"

"I'm sure I don't know," responded Caroline Endicott. "But there's one thing certain, Zeto is going to be in my bedroom every night hereafter, whether dad likes it or not. I thought you promised to teach me to drive this car?" suddenly observing that they were not headed for the less-frequented streets.

"I did." Brent laughed in pure joy at having her with him. On finding that he would have an afternoon free, he had called her up on the telephone just as she was leaving the house for a long hike with Zeto. Not being able to leave his office at once, he had agreed to meet her on the Speedway an hour later.

Caroline's walk there and around Haines' Point had brought color to her cheeks and had helped her to shake

off her morbid thoughts. She was in fine spirits by the time Brent reached her and the fact that she had neglected to inform her father how she planned to spend the afternoon troubled her not at all.

"There's not much traffic in Rock Creek Park nowa-days," explained Brent. "We'll turn off here very shortly.

Zeto, occupying the whole of the back seat, enjoyed the run out Connecticut Avenue and into the park with almost human intelligence, especially when Brent circled through the zoo and, with his head pressed against the windows, the dog caught sight of numerous animals taking an airing through their restricted outdoor quarters. Caroline was tempted to linger there also, for it was her first visit to the zoo, but her anxiety to try her skill at driving an American car, on the chance that her father would eventually present her with one, outweighed everything else.

Brent found her an apt pupil; and it was doubtful which got the most enjoyment out of the lesson. Zeto, having been thrown off his seat numerous times when she had unexpectedly stalled the engine, was plainly anxious to resume their walking tour, but Caroline, intent on learning the eccentricities of the car and how to operate it, paid not the slightest attention to his attempts to attract her attention.

"Don't bother me, Zeto," she exclaimed, as the dog balanced himself on his hind legs and tried to reach

over the seat and lick her face. "Please let me drive home, Mr. Brent," and catching her eyes, sparkling with excitement, Brent nodded a happy assent.

Under his guidance Caroline drove through the park, to Chevy Chase Circle and from there, via Tennallytown, into Massachusetts Avenue. Avoiding the short cut, he had her keep on down the avenue to Normanstone Drive.

"Perhaps I'd better drive from here on," he suggested; "there's a mean hill ahead and the gear shift sometimes slips out of second into neutral."

Reluctantly Caroline changed seats with him. She had always been fond of motoring and she realized that if she had a car of her own it would make a doubly welcome diversion in the monotony of her existence. On seeing Brent leave the car, Zeto made a flying leap over the front seat and was off into the woods before Caroline could call him back.

"What's he chasing?" she asked. "Why, this is the woods behind our house!"

"Yes." Brent stood staring at the spot where Zeto had last been seen. "He must have spotted a squirrel, or perhaps your cat," smiling mischievously at her as he climbed in behind the wheel.

"I hope he chews her up!" exclaimed Caroline devoutly, as they took the upper road. On reaching the steep grade Brent decreased speed to go into second

gear and their progress continued slow until they reached the top of the hill.

"Oh, stop! Quick!" and before her mystified companion could bring the car to an abrupt halt, Caroline was out and running up the bank toward the woods. Halfway there stood a man in a sweater and facing him was Zeto, crouching, ready to spring.

"Stand still, don't move!" called Caroline as she ran toward them.

"Call off your dog!" Page's words covered a palpitating heart, which beat even faster at Zeto's deep-throated growl.

"Zeto, down!" And obedient to her spoken word, the Airedale dropped at her feet, but his eyes remained fixed on the taxi driver, watching the man's slightest movement.

"Ye oughtn't to have such a beast loose," declared Page, his fright making his voice husky. "He's dangerous, he is."

"Not unless you molest him," Caroline retorted with spirit. "What did you do, throw a stone at him?"

But Page gave over his end of the argument at sight of Brent charging up the bank; it was one thing to browbeat a young girl unescorted; quite another to face an irate man six feet in height.

"'S'll right, no harm done," he mumbled, touching his cap, and moved off down the hillside.

"What an unpleasant party," commented Caroline;

she put her hand on Zeke's collar as the dog rose. "I hope I don't encounter him again."

Brent was looking after the taxi driver with lively interest and barely heard her words.

"By Jove, that's Page, the driver of the car Mary died in," he ejaculated. "He was with Barlow at Mary's funeral. I wonder why the police didn't tell the newspapers they were going to release him?"

"So that was he!" Caroline's bright color faded a little. "I wish I'd known sooner; I wanted to ask him some questions." She paused. "Do you suppose he knows who killed Mary?"

"He swears he doesn't." Brent looked at his watch. "And if he did know there would be no object in not telling, for he must realize that he is under suspicion until the murderer is found."

"True; but"—she hesitated—"suppose he's hoping the murderer will buy his silence."

"Good Lord, what a corking idea! And Page is skulking around here, too, the instant he's released from jail. Mary was killed just at the foot of the hill. What a peach of a story for my paper!" Brent looked at her with boyish enthusiasm. "I've got just time to get there before the late edition goes to press. Come on," and he started to hurry her toward his car.

"Wait," she exclaimed. "It's only a short way home; I'll walk there, and you can save time by turn-

ing right around and driving through Massachusetts Park."

"That's true;" reluctantly. "But suppose Page bothers you again?"

"I'll not hold Zeto next time," dryly. "Go on, now, please," and giving him no time for further protests, she faced about and ran towards the woods, with Zeto romping at her side.

Caroline had found out that the bolt on the door leading from the terraced garden to the sun parlor was easy to open with the aid of a hairpin, and she had carefully provided herself with several from Mrs. Endicott's stock, having secured them from the latter's day nurse for just such an emergency. At that hour she felt reasonably certain that she could get Zeto inside the house without being detected. She was therefore, considerably startled to encounter Pierre just as she stepped inside the room.

"I will take Zeto to ze garage, Mam'selle," he volunteered. "But, yes, Mam'selle, you cannot haf heem in ze house."

"But I will!" And Caroline's foot came down with a decided stamp. She felt about in her bag; alas, she hadn't a cent over a quarter, and that was too trifling a bribe to offer any servant. "It's all right, Pierre."

"Non, non, Mam'selle; Zeto he sleep more nicely in ze garage; I haf hees dinnaire zer already," and Zeto, accustomed to going with the Frenchman to his quar-

ters in the garage, followed him through the open door.

Caroline started to call Pierre back, but a second's thought convinced her of the futility of a verbal row with one of her father's servants; she was also thoroughly assured that her father would uphold Pierre; it might lead to Zeto being sent away altogether.

Caroline tossed off her coat and hat and dropped down in the nearest chair; she wanted time to collect her thoughts before encountering another member of the household. Her impulsive suggestion that Page might be willing to sell his silence, provided he knew or suspected the identity of the murderer, and the fact that he had immediately appeared in that neighborhood, made her wonder if he had been seeking her father.

The thought was terrifying. Oh, if she had never seen her father with that blood-stained knife; if he had not attempted suicide with it! But he had! Caroline wrung her hands. There must be some solution to the mystery, some way in which she could probe it without involving her father. Was there no one else on Normanstone Drive in the early hours of Tuesday morning? Ah, she had it—Carl Ashby.

But how reach him? Should she go to his house again, and alone? Barry Langhorne's words flashed into her mind and she colored as hotly as when he had spoken them. Slowly she turned and looked about—she had the room to herself—and the telephone!

It seemed ages before she got Central and gave her the number listed in the directory—Cleveland 99—receiving the wrong number caused delay; again she got Central and with more insistence repeated, "Cleveland 99."

There was an interminable pause, then a masculine voice came over the wires:

"Who's calling?"

"Miss Caroline Endicott"—there was a loud click and the telephone at the other end was abruptly shut off.

Caroline sat back in her chair, the telephone instrument still resting in her lap, held with relaxed fingers. She had recognized, in that brief instant, the voice of the man who answered her—Barry Langhorne.

CHAPTER XII

LOST IN THE MIST

BARRY LANGHORNE knocked the ashes from his cigar, then laid the stub among others on the tray at his elbow. Crossing his bedroom, he paused for a moment before the high chiffonier and smoothed his hair with the aid of the mirror above it; then with a final look to see that his tie was quite straight, he went into the hall and sought Mrs. Endicott's suite at the far end. Miss Holt came to the door in response to his knock. At sight of him she stepped further into the hall, drawing the door almost entirely closed behind her.

"Can I see Mrs. Endicott?" inquired Langhorne, lowering his voice hastily as her finger rose to her lips in silent admonition.

"She has just fallen asleep." The trained nurse spoke in a whisper.

"Suppose I wait?" with a captivating smile, which showed his fine, white teeth to advantage. But Miss Holt shook her head decidedly. "My patient is arranged for the night," she explained. "Besides, an interview with you"—she hesitated.

"Might prove exciting," he supplemented, dryly.

"To see any one," she corrected in haste, "at this hour would be apt to upset Mrs. Endicott in her present nervous state."

"How about to-morrow?" suggestively. "Set your own time, Miss Holt, and I'll be here."

Again the trained nurse shook her head, this time plainly in doubt. "You must ask Dr. McLane; the case is in his hands."

Langhorne paused. "I'd rather find out first if Mrs. Endicott will see me," he remarked, and Miss Holt, about to retire once again into the sick room, waited for his next slowly spoken words. "Suppose you ask her."

Miss Holt looked at him attentively and in her perplexity rubbed her right foot up and down her left leg; she had very pretty feet and ankles; they were her one vanity and nothing short of torture would have induced her to wear disfiguring shoes or anything but silk stockings of the finest quality. Langhorne bore her scrutiny with courteous patience.

"Have you spoken to Professor Endicott?" she inquired.

"Is that necessary?" raising his eyebrows interrogatively. "Do you know, Miss Holt, it is becoming rather odd—this seclusion in which *my* mother-in-law is kept," with marked emphasis. "Can you explain it?"

"That's not my place," she retorted warmly. "I but carry out orders."

"And they bar my presence from the sick room?" swiftly.

Miss Holt evaded a direct reply. "Mrs. Endicott's illness and her present condition preclude any visits except from her husband." She hesitated. "I must refer you to him."

"Thanks." Langhorne bowed deeply. "Just a moment," as Miss Holt laid her hand on the knob of the door. "Does Caroline Endicott spend much time with her stepmother?"

The nurse's surprise at the question was obvious; again she dodged a direct response. "I am not on duty in the daytime and therefore cannot answer your question. Good night," and she whisked inside the door and closed it softly but securely.

When Langhorne reached the lower hall he sought the coat closet and came out carrying his hat and overcoat. Happening to glance inside the living room he saw Caroline occupying her favorite perch on the hassock by the fire. For a few minutes he was content to watch her varying expressions as she skimmed through the novel, then on an impulse he could not explain, he hurried over to her.

"It's stuffy indoors, let's go for a walk," he suggested, and met her startled gaze with a bland smile. "Why not?"

"At this hour?"

"It isn't so late," swinging about and glancing at the

clock. "Just about nine. Come on," he coaxed. "A brisk walk will be a fine incentive to sleep, and you don't look as though you've had your share of that lately," observing with an air of concern the unwonted shadows under her eyes.

Caroline gazed up at him in puzzled silence. All during dinner, which she had eaten alone in state in the dining room, her father having telephoned that he was detained at the club, and Langhorne not appearing, the latter had been in her thoughts. His intimate friendship with Carl Ashby would readily explain his presence in the latter's house when she had telephoned that afternoon, but it did not explain why he had abruptly hung up the receiver when he found that she was at the other end of the wire; unless he was determined she should not get in direct communication with the artist. If so, what was the motive behind his conduct?

Stooping down Langhorne held out his hand. "Do come," he urged, and his smile was very persuasive.

Resting her hand lightly in his, Caroline stood stiffly erect; she had sat in a cramped position for some time. "Old age," she laughed, as she unconsciously stretched herself. "I won't keep you a second," and she rushed upstairs. But once in her bedroom she lingered long enough before her mirror to make sure that even a captious critic could find no fault with her appearance.

"Let's get Zeto," she suggested, as they left the house, and waiting for no reply, she hurried to the

garage. The chauffeur's sleeping quarters were upstairs in the big brick building and he came down in response to Langhorne's knock.

"Pierre took Zeto with him into town, Miss Caroline," Thomas explained. "I thought he asked your permission."

"It's all right, Thomas; good night," and Caroline turned to her companion as Thomas, echoing her words, locked the garage door. "Where shall we go?"

"Are you good for a long tramp?"

"Yes, indeed; it's a gorgeous night." There was little wind and the stars were out; however it was a mackerel sky and a feel of rain in the atmosphere presaged a storm not many hours distant.

"Suppose we walk towards the Cathedral," and suiting his step to hers, Langhorne swung along by her side. As they left the Endicott mansion and Massachusetts Park behind them, Langhorne, by adroit questioning, drew Caroline into talking of her life in England and of her uncle and aunt whom she loved so dearly. But every time he tried to steer the conversation around to her father, Caroline skillfully evaded the subject. Her reluctance to discuss Professor Endicott did not escape Langhorne's notice and his eyes held a curious light in them as he looked now and then at his companion. She had thrown back the collar of her fur coat and walked with chest almost bare; her shapely neck and throat shone ivory white against the hand-

some fur and her small sport hat, just showing the curly ends of her bobbed hair, formed a perfect setting for her cheeks, flushed by the wind, and her eyes sparkling with thorough enjoyment of the out-of-door exercise.

"Why didn't you tell me that you took that long walk with Zeto this afternoon?" he exclaimed reproachfully, as they turned back. "I would never have dragged you all this way; you must be fearfully tired."

"I'm not," she protested. "I wouldn't have said anything about it, only you asked when I had last seen your cousin, Mr. Brent."

"So he was with you, too." There was a subtle change in Langhorne's tone which Caroline would have detected but that a car, climbing Massachusetts Avenue hill, almost drowned his words with its noisy rattle and wheeze. "We are not so very far from your home now, Miss Caroline."

Caroline sighed and unconsciously her footsteps lagged. To go back to the four walls of her room was not an inviting prospect. The time had flown swiftly in Langhorne's society. Her first shyness had worn off under his magnetic personality and in her friendly chatter she had revealed the warmth and tenderness of her nature.

Langhorne may have guessed her thoughts, for suddenly he stopped at what seemed to be the entrance to a private estate and turned into the driveway.

"We don't have to go in just yet," he said. "How would you like to look through the great telescope at the Naval Observatory? It's just a few rods away from the superintendent's house. The Admiral is a good friend of mine."

Caroline's eyes sparkled more than ever. "What fun!" she ejaculated, then abashed, walked silently ahead of Langhorne up the path to where the great Observatory shone white against the skyline. To speak of having fun with a man whose wife had been murdered only three days before was in decidedly questionable taste, not to mention unfeeling. But, if she stopped to think of it, Langhorne had never the air of conscious grief which sometimes stamps widowers; his reserve, rather than any spoken word, gave her the impression of hidden fires. She judged him to be the type of man who would sacrifice all for those he loved and on the other hand, when once aroused, would prove an implacable enemy.

Their arrival at the Observatory was hailed with delight by Admiral Smith, and Caroline was taken to the great room where was housed one of the finest telescopes in the world. She was soon absorbed in its mysteries as unfolded by the astronomer in charge of it.

"The Admiral was obliged to go into town," explained one of the attendants to Caroline an hour later. "Senator Langhorne drove in with him. They will be

back very shortly, and the Senator asked that you wait for him."

Caroline looked blankly at the man; for a moment she did not sense the meaning of the words. "Good gracious! I never missed them!" She turned smilingly to the scientist. "That is a tribute to you, sir." Then her glance strayed to the clock and she actually jumped. "It's after eleven," she gasped. "Oh, won't I catch it when dad finds I'm out." She colored warmly when she met the scientist's amused look. "I must go."

"Most certainly not," the latter retorted. "Not at this hour."

"I know the way home and it isn't far," warmly. "I've often passed here when exercising my dog, but I didn't know then it was the Observatory. Where are my hat and coat?"

"In the hall." He led the way there and assisted her into her wraps. The same attendant who had delivered Langhorne's message to her, came up just then.

"You are wanted on the telephone, sir; it's quite urgent. Can I help the young lady—"

"Oh, no." Caroline spoke quickly—the attendant looked both old and ill. "I'll wait right here by the front door, don't either of you worry about me. Senator Langhorne will be along soon," and she nodded a friendly good night to both men.

But as ten minutes grew to twenty, her patience gave

out. Opening the front door she peered outside; no one was in sight. She stood a moment, debating, then stepped further into the vestibule and incautiously released her hold on the door just as a gust of wind, coming through a partly opened window in the back of the hall, blew it shut. Rather startled at being locked out, Caroline waited in the vestibule for another brief interval, then buttoning her coat up about her throat and thrusting her hands into her pockets, she hurried down the long walk leading to Massachusetts Avenue.

She was commencing to enjoy her midnight excursion when she left the avenue and took what she thought was a short cut into the Park opening from it. The sky had become overcast and as she hurried down the incline into the ravine which she knew she had to cross before reaching the uplands beyond, the mist which frequently forms there had enveloped her.

She had covered what she judged to be about half the distance to her home when she made a misstep and came down heavily on the ground. For a number of minutes she remained where she was, trying to get back her breath. When she finally regained her feet, she realized that she was completely turned around.

Caroline wasted a brief second or two abusing herself for her idiocy in not waiting at the Observatory for Langhorne to return, then her resentment grew against him. It was discourteous, outrageous of him to have

left her and gone into town with the Admiral; he might at least have consulted her on the subject. Her small hands clenched themselves; it was not often that she was so thoroughly angry.

But how to extricate herself from her present predicament? She could not remain in Massachusetts Park all night! Oh, if only Zeto was with her! And if she hadn't been such an utter fool as to leave home at all!

Checking her vain regrets, Caroline walked steadily ahead. If she kept on long enough she would have to get somewhere! That was logical. She had gone what she judged to be a quarter of a mile when to her right she thought she heard voices and made her way in that direction. She was no longer walking on a graveled roadbed, of that she was aware, and she had to progress even more slowly in picking her way through what in summer would be heavy underbrush.

The voices were more distinct now and Caroline was about to make herself known when one of the speakers spoke loudly and in anger:

"You can't expose me without exposing yourself."

Caroline halted; there was no mistaking that voice; its peculiar nasal twang was unforgettable.

Just then the mist cleared, blown by a passing wind, and her father's figure was clearly outlined before her eyes. Caroline stood too petrified to move. What would he say if he discovered she was there; what

would he do? Even as she hestitated the mist again settled down and Professor Endicott was obliterated; the voices grew fainter and more faint and then died away utterly.

The girl followed blindly in their wake, her mind groping in bewilderment over the scene she had partly witnessed. Who was the man with her father? She had not even caught a glimpse of him nor heard his voice except in an indistinguishable murmur; but her father—what did his clearly spoken words signify and to whom were they addressed?

She was conscious that she was walking up a hillside and kept doggedly on. Her father knew the way home if she didn't, and to follow the direction he had taken would lead her there. How she would get into the house without arousing some one was a problem she felt could wait until she had reached the mansion.

Through the mist, faintly at first, then more distinctly, shone a red light, and her pace quickened; it would be a vast relief to get indoors. The mist was closing in more thickly about her, but it shifted a trifle as she went up the flagged walk and at the foot of the short flight of steps she paused, aghast.

Caroline's eyes swept the front of the house and then looked into the open front door through which the red lamp gleamed—

Carl Ashby's bungalow lay before her.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SPIDER'S WEB

AS if hypnotized Caroline continued to regard the open doorway. She had been absolutely certain that by following the direction taken by her father she would reach home, and now, to find herself in front of Ashby's bungalow was a distinct shock. Of one fact she was positive; she had not veered about after hearing her father and his unseen companion talking—and her home and the bungalow were in opposite parts of Massachusetts Park. She could not very well have walked east and west without turning around. The only conclusion that presented itself, therefore, was that Professor Endicott had walked toward the bungalow instead of going home.

Suppose his companion had been Carl Ashby? They knew each other, probably well, for the artist had painted Mrs. Endicott's portrait, therefore they might have been out for a stroll together and returned to Ashby's home for a visit. The fact that it was after midnight and a most unusual hour for visiting or strolling about Massachusetts Park upset Caroline's reasoning, as did, also, the words her father had spoken:

"You cannot expose me without exposing yourself." Suppose they had been addressed to this unknown Ashby—the man she had seen but twice, first bowed in grief over the murdered woman's body, and secondly at her funeral services!

Caroline drew a long, long breath. The mystery of it all gripped her, and forgetful of self she moved slowly toward the beckoning red lamp in the cozy hall sending its soft beams just beyond the open door. If her father was inside, he could escort her home; if he wasn't, why, Carl Ashby might telephone for a taxi—after their interview. Of one thing Caroline was determined; she would learn before the hour was out the connection between the head of the house of Ashby and her own family. She would trust to her woman's wit to see her through.

The push button on the front door engaged Caroline's attention and she kept her finger on it continuously, but no one came. Perhaps the buzzer was out of order? That might be the reason for the open door. But what visitors could Ashby be expecting at that hour of the night?

Caroline's heart was beating faster as she stepped over the threshold and into the bungalow. It was a small hall, almost square; at the back she made out a passageway opening from it which ran across the house; to her right was apparently a dining room from the glimpse she had of shining silver on the high sideboard;

long heavy portières were pulled entirely across the doorway on her left. In much trepidation she parted them and poked her head inside the small opening.

At the far corner a small candle-power side bracket was burning, giving but scant illumination in the large room. Slowly Caroline drew aside the portières and advanced into what she took to be a studio—living room, judging from its furnishings. It was the same room she had peered into from one of the northern windows when outside the house with Barry Langhorne on their fruitless visit to Ashby. She paused by a standing lamp and turned up one of its bulbs and then the other, then looked about. A comfortable lounge, easy chairs, tables, littered indiscriminately with magazines, smoking sets and the various odds and ends which a man gathers about him, oil paintings on the walls, a few artists' sketches—but no artist. So far as eye could see, Caroline had the studio to herself.

There was a door directly opposite where she stood and she crossed over to it; it led, however, to the covered porch at the eastern end of the bungalow, and she turned back. In so doing her glance fell upon an easel on which rested a portrait of Mary Langhorne. It was a startling likness and, fascinated, Caroline drew nearer and studied the canvas with wide, curious eyes. She was no judge of technique but even to her, the artist had reproduced faultlessly the flesh tints, the soft tones of the black gown, and the beauty of the

face—he had gone farther—Mary's faults and foibles, her shallow soul and jealous nature were pitilessly portrayed. At the base of the canvas a square card bore the legend: *The Woman In Black—A Study.* Caroline turned away from the portrait with a shudder; it revealed too much. In their brief but pleasant intercourse she had taken Mary at her own estimation nor looked beneath the surface for unfathomed depths.

"Mr. Ashby, oh, Mr. Ashby!" she called softly; her voice echoed back to her in the stillness—that was all.

Caroline gathered her courage in both hands. Passing the huge chimney filled with partly consumed logs, she reëntered the hall and from it walked into the passageway at the back. At one end was a bedroom, another bedroom was across the passageway from the studio—both were empty; the kitchen and pantry were likewise bare of occupants. She turned out the electric lights, which she had switched on, with a sense of increasing nervousness. Leaving the pantry she went into the dining room, hoping thereby to shorten her walk to the front door.

The light from the red lamp in the hall but served to intensify the darkness and Caroline, in her haste to leave the house, ran into a chair. Her out-flung arm touched human flesh. With a suppressed cry, she staggered back against the wall, her knees half crumpled under her, and she clutched the serving table for sup-

port. By accident her gloved fingers touched an electric switch and a second later the room was flooded with light.

Not two feet from her a man lay sprawling in an arm chair, his head moving feebly from side to side. For an instant she stood staring at him, then sprang to his side.

"Mr. Ashby!" she gasped. "Oh, what is it? What is the matter?"

He looked into her face as she bent over him, his lips moved but only a trickle of water ran out of them and down his chin. For an unbearable second his eyes continued to gaze at her in piteous appeal—a rattle in his throat—and all was over.

Caroline looked at the dead man with cheeks that rivaled his in whiteness. Straightening up she gazed dazedly about her. Ashby's chair, as the foot of the dining table, was pushed slightly away from it. Near his hand was a tray with sandwiches, wine glasses and a bottle of gin; evidently he had been eating a light supper.

With the blood flowing again toward her heart, Caroline moved over to a telephone by the pantry door with the intention of summoning aid; but once there she paused in doubt. No human aid would avail Carl Ashby now. And what if she was found there alone with the dead man? How could she explain her presence except by saying she had followed her father to

the bungalow. Who would substantiate her statement? Not her father, for he wasn't there.

In sudden blind, frantic terror she fled from the bungalow. As she gained the upper street the mist became less dense and she modified her running footsteps to a brisk walk. On approaching the Endicott mansion she faltered to a stop. How was she to enter the house without the inmates knowing that she was out at that hour of the night? Deep in thought she circled the mansion and stopped in the shadow of the garage. Ah, she had it! Leaning down she stripped off her stockings and replaced her slippers on her bare feet, after first carefully wiping them off. Then removing her gloves she put them with her stockings in her coat pocket and with the aid of a gold bar pin, her only ornament, she ripped out the hem of her dress. It was a new crêpe de chine gown, entirely white, and she had donned it with relief after the somber garb she had worn since Tuesday; in fact she had spent a wearisome hour that morning shortening the dress, a piece of work she had counted upon having Nurse Nana complete, and she had only sewed in the hem with strong basting thread.

Caroline contemplated the lengthened dress with satisfaction; to the none too curious, with its let out hem, it would pass as a silk night gown, of which she had a number. Removing her hat, she stuck it inside her coat and taking a key from her pocket, approached

the small side door of the garage. Thomas had given her that key soon after Zeto had been banished to the garage, occasioned by Mrs. Endicott's dislike of dogs.

Zeto came at once in answer to her low whistle. "Quiet, Zeto," she whispered in his ear, as he jumped upon her in his extravagant joy. "Quiet, boy; down!" and closing the garage door, she hurried back to the mansion.

There were no lights at any of the windows on that side and Caroline went around to the south; ah, there was a tiny gleam under the shade of Mrs. Endicott's boudoir window. Caroline gathered a few pebbles and tossed them toward the window; her first throws were short; she dared not put too much strength in them for fear of breaking the pane. Her third attempt was more successful and within a few minutes the shade was pulled up and Miss Holt raised the window and looked out.

"Come down and let me in, please," called Caroline softly. "The back door."

The trained nurse closed the window, first waving her hand in silent assent, and Caroline hurried around to the kitchen. She was kept waiting for three or four minutes and occupied the time in collaring Zeto, who reveling in his unexpected freedom, was racing up and down the garden. Had Caroline glanced upward, she would have seen a face peering down upon her from a window—a face white, distorted, almost un-

recognizable; it disappeared as the girl ran inside the kitchen.

Miss Holt closed the back door and regarded Caroline inquiringly as the girl, using Zeto partly as a shield, slid into the dark hallway leading to the back stairs. They had reached the second floor before the trained nurse caught up with them.

"Where in the world have you been, Miss Caroline?" she asked, pausing with her hand on Mrs. Endicott's door.

"I couldn't sleep, and I just had to have Zeto to keep me company," Caroline's voice was low but it held a carrying quality and reached the ears of Barry Langhorne and he paused at the turn of the front stairs to hear what she was saying. "I forgot to put the back door on the latch when I went to the garage, and so found myself locked out. Thanks so much, Miss Holt, for letting me in. Good night," and Caroline scurried along to her bedroom.

Once inside it, with the door safely locked, she dropped exhausted on the bed, one thought uppermost. How could she notify the police of Carl Ashby's death without involving either her father or herself?

At Police Headquarters a sleepy sergeant answered Central's call. A few minutes later he was pounding on Inspector Mitchell's door.

"Sorry to disturb you, Inspector," he explained, as Mitchell sat up on the couch and eyed him, half awake.

He had been detained at the office until after midnight and had decided to sleep there rather than go home for the few hours remaining before going on duty again. "But there's a message telephoned in that that there artist, Mr. Carl Ashby, him that was here this afternoon talking with Detective Barlow, has just died in his home in Massachusetts Park."

Mitchell bounded to his feet, fully awake at last.

"Who sent the message, Mason?"

"Sure an' I dunno; the party rang off before I asked." He paused to help the inspector on with his coat. "'Twas a man's voice."

CHAPTER XIV

THE HOTEL REGISTER

INSPECTOR Mitchell exchanged glances with the coroner as the latter rose from Carl Ashby's side. "I should say hydrocyanic acid," pronounced Coroner Penfield thoughtfully. "The autopsy will tell us definitely, however."

"I'm sure you are right," agreed Mitchell. "There's no mistaking the odor of bitter almonds." Both men turned to the tray on the dining table. "Three glasses, one partly filled, one empty, the third unused." The inspector's hand hovered over the clean glass, then moved on to the bottle; most of its contents were gone. "Sloe gin," he remarked, reading the label. "Pre-war stuff and the finest brand. *That* didn't kill him, in itself, but it's the best possible medium to disguise the taste of bitter almonds."

Coroner Penfield signed to his assistant. "Seal these for the labratory test," he directed, indicating the tray's contents; then he addressed his colleague. "Of course the poison may have been taken with suicidal intent."

"And again it may not." Mitchell walked over to the door. "Where are the photographers?" They

came in answer to his hail and Coroner Penfield waited with Mitchell while flashlight pictures were taken of the body from various angles with a wide-angle-lens camera. Changing the lens, the photographer consulted with Mitchell and Penfield before making a number of close-ups; the last two required additional care and it was fully an hour later before the body was removed and Mitchell accompanied by the coroner, went over the bungalow from top to bottom.

The men found the two bedrooms, store room and bath on the second floor in good order, except for dust, which undisturbed, indicated that the rooms had been unoccupied for a period of time. The first floor plan of the house was simple, the studio and dining room, with a small entrance hall being to the front, and three bedrooms and two baths at the back, with a central hall running from the porches at the north and south ends. In the west end was the kitchen and pantry, both spotlessly clean. The cellar did not run under the whole house, and it contained only the oil furnace, which was still in operation.

Returning from his fruitless search, Inspector Mitchell met Paul Barlow in the doorway of what had been Carl Ashby's bedroom. The little detective's eyes were bright with excitement.

"Judging from the tossed back bedclothes, Inspector, I'm inclined to believe Mr. Ashby went to bed and then got up and dressed himself."

"Well, he had on a pair of trousers and a smoking jacket and a soft shirt." Mitchell glanced inside the bedroom; he had been there before on his first arrival within half an hour of the time the telephone message reached him. "Ashby wore bedroom slippers; there are his shoes by the side of the bed. That would bear out your theory, Barlow."

Turning silently, the two men went back to the dining room. With the removal of the body no attempt had been made to straighten the chairs, and except for the raising of the shades, letting in the sunlight, everything remained as it was on Mitchell's arrival. Barlow bent over the serving table and examined the highly polished mahogany with a magnifying glass. Turning abruptly he beckoned to one of the camera men watching him from the doorway.

"Here's a smudge!" he exclaimed. He sprayed a bit of aluminum powder on the barely visible outlines and brushed away the excess. The white powder made the smudge resemble the whorls and lines of a thumb print. Barlow grunted with satisfaction. "Take that," he directed, and stood quietly while the thumb-print camera was placed over the spot. The pressing of the trigger lighted a group of electric bulbs inside the box, automatically exposing the plate for the proper time. "Let me have the results at once," he said, and the camera man started for the door. "Make the usual enlargements. Inspector, we've found quite a

number of thumb-prints. But come into the studio," and in his excitement he almost pushed Mitchell across the hall and between the portières at the entrance to the studio.

Barlow halted Mitchell in front of the portrait on the easel.

"Recognize that?" he asked.

"Mary Langhorne!" Mitchell stooped over and read the words on the card at the bottom of the portrait. "*The Woman in Black—A Study.* Hmm! he's right, but it's more of a study than ever, now. What connection is there, Barlow, between this dead artist and Senator Langhorne's murdered wife?"

"Beg pardon." A plain-clothes policeman came into the studio. "But here's a colored woman who says she belongs here," and moving his big frame into the hall he made room for a diminutive darky. She looked like the pictures of a gnome, her black wizened face was moist from fright and under her bonnet her mottled gray wool was nearly straight.

"Whut's happened to po' marster?" she asked. "Laws, I ain't had sech a skeer sence I wuz knee high to a grasshopper as when dat ar man done stop me fum goin' inter my own kitchen wid dis hyar key," holding it up as she spoke. "Whar my marster?" and she looked piteously about. "He know Aunt Dinah."

Barlow pushed forward a chair. "Sit down, Aunt Dinah," he suggested kindly. "Mr. Ashby died last

night." He waited as she gave a wailing cry and covered her eyes with a talon-like hand.

"De po' marster! De po' marster!" she almost crooned the words, rocking herself back and forth; suddenly she looked up. "Did he suffer long?"

"No, not long."

"Was de doctah wid him?"

"No"—Mitchell cut into the conversation. "We think he died—alone."

The old darky broke into fresh weeping. "Sumpin' done tole me I orter been hyar yestiddy," she moaned. "But fo' de pas' tree, fo' days I bin in misery wif de rhumatics so I couldn' hahdly move."

"That's too bad, Aunt Dinah," and at the sympathy in Barlow's voice the darky wiped her eyes with a torn but clean handkerchief and thrust it back into her mittens which she had rolled up into a ball. "When did you last see Mr. Ashby?"

"Lemme see, 'twas goin' on Wednesday noon," she paused to consider. "My marster cum ter see me an' tole me not to worry; he'd jes' git his meals down-town an' leave de baid an' things fo' me to tidy up whin I got back."

Barlow glanced in some chagrin at Mitchell. "My theory about the bedclothes appears wrong," he said. "Apparently Ashby did not go to bed and then get up to eat supper with—" he caught Aunt Dinah's eyes turned inquisitively in his direction and said no more.

Without answering the detective, Mitchell strode up and down the studio. "Did you notice the sandwiches?" he stopped and spoke below his breath. Barlow nodded. "They weren't home made, but must have been put up in some restaurant or tea room and wrapped in oil paper. Only two were eaten."

As low as he spoke, his words were overheard by Aunt Dinah.

"My marster often brung food home at night," she said. "He allus et befo' goin' to baid. But how cum yo' all heerd he was daid ef he wuz all alone? 'Twarn't nobody livin' hyar but him."

She waited in vain for an answer to her question. When Barlow finally spoke she actually jumped at the sound of his voice in the stillness.

"Come here, Aunt Dinah, and tell me who this portrait is?" and he pointed to the one on the easel.

The old darky hobbled across the intervening space, adjusting her spectacles as she went.

"Why, dat am Miss Mary!" she exclaimed; "her dat ma'ied Senator Langhorne 'bout two weeks ago."

"And was murdered on Monday night just below here in Massachusetts Park," added Barlow softly. "Were she and Mr. Ashby great friends?"

"I ain' never heerd," answered the old woman cautiously. "Miss Mary cum hyar sometimes fo' tea, she an' Mr. Langhorne an' de odder folks." She looked sharply at the two men. "My marster wan't de ma'yin'

kin'; he painted ladies' po'traits an' dat wuz de en' "—pointing to several sketches of prominent women near the easel to illustrate her meaning. Then with a briskness which surprised Barlow she made for the door. "Ef yo' all 'scuse me, I'll go tidy up."

The detective caught up with her in the hall after a whispered word with Mitchell.

"It's all right for you to stay here, Aunt Dinah," he said. "But don't do any tidying up, as you call it; everything must be left just as it is for the present."

"Yessir." Aunt Dinah blinked, Barlow's tone did not encourage disobedience; she started again for the kitchen but the detective called her back.

"Was it Mr. Ashby's custom to leave the front door open?" he asked.

"Sometimes he done it, an' ag'in sometimes he didn'," she answered cryptically. "Ef I wasn't in an' he wuz 'spectin' frien's, he'd leave it open or leastways unlocked so's dey could cum right in." Observing the detective's interest, she added: "My marster was powerful hahd ob hearin'."

"You mean he was deaf?"

"Yessir; most stone deef," and Aunt Dinah retreated to the kitchen.

Mitchell had joined Barlow and they were talking in undertones when the same plain-clothes policeman that had ushered in Aunt Dinah, came up to them.

"Headquarters wishes to know, Inspector, if you are

ready to notify the newspapers of Mr. Ashby's death?" he asked. "They are holding the wire."

"I'll answer it," and Mitchell hurried to the telephone.

Barlow looked at his watch. "Seven o'clock," he exclaimed. "Gee, I'm hungry." He eyed the big policeman wistfully. "I wonder if Aunt Dinah couldn't give us some breakfast?"

"Sure; the pantry's full of provisions; but just a minute," as Barlow brushed by him. "When we lifted the silver tray off the dining-room table, I found this paper sticking to the bottom of it."

Barlow took the paper from him; it was not very large and cut almost square; there were the marks of two creases where it had been folded lengthwise, and two other creases at each end. He turned the paper over, then reversed it quickly—the side, which had evidently stuck to the tray judging from the slight moisture on it, was blank. He turned the paper over again—on that side were traced the three capital letters—P. P. C.

The city editor of the *Argosy* looked up and greeted Freddy Brent with a curt nod and continued his conversation on the telephone, at the same time pushing the assignment book under the young reporter's nose.

"You're to cover the Langhorne mystery," he said, hanging up the telephone receiver. "That was good

stuff you turned in in time for the late edition yesterday. What luck did you have last night?"

"Rotten!" Brent sank down in the chair by the desk; he was glad to rest. "Page gave us the slip just when we least expected it—that infernal fog! For a time it envleoped the whole city." He smiled even in his exasperation. "The operative Barlow sent to shadow Page is sick over his failure; he's afraid he'll be fired."

They were interrupted by another telephone call, then the city editor settled back in his chair, tipping it at an angle to let his feet rest on his desk.

"I believe you've the right idea," he said thoughtfully. "Page is worth watching, and if he's really in the 'know' as to who murdered the poor girl, he's likely to return to the vicinity of her home or her husband. Where's Langhorne?"

"Staying with Professor Endicott."

"He's a cousin of yours?" interrogatively, and Brent nodded assent. The *Argosy* editor continued to stare at him for a few minutes in silence, then came to a decision.

"Hop up to the Endicotts'," he said. "Hang 'round all day and see if Page turns up. Stay as long as necessary, to-morrow or next day; I'll have you excused from other assignments. This Langhorne story promises a big sensation when it breaks. So long," and the busy editor turned back to his work.

It was just seven-thirty o'clock when Brent left Childs, much refreshed by a hearty breakfast, consisting entirely of coffee and griddle cakes. His next stop was at a florist shop, and when he came out he had left Caroline Endicott's name and address and a week's salary with the smiling clerk.

Contrary to custom he drove straight out Connecticut Avenue and into Woodley Road instead of going through Massachusetts Park to the Endicotts'. His ring at the front bell was answered by Pierre and he was ushered into the dining room where Professor Endicott sat alone at the table.

"Glad to see you, Brent." Endicott shook hands with more heartiness than usual. "Won't have any breakfast?" as his guest waved away the proffered rolls. "I'm sorry you didn't wait until you got here; anyway a cup of coffee, Pierre, for Mr. Brent."

"Where is Miss Caroline?" asked Brent, enjoying his first taste of the golden brown coffee which the butler had poured into his cup.

"Breakfasting in her room," shortly. "Barry sent word not to wait for him." In turning to take some toast the professor knocked the morning paper off the corner of the table where he had placed it on Brent's entrance. "Don't bother," as the reporter stooped to pick it up. "I've read such news as there is." He paused. "I see the police have released Page, the taxi

driver, and that he's been seen in this neighborhood."

"Yes." Brent finished his coffee and declined more. "Your daughter and I met him here last night. What is it, sir?"

The professor had bent forward with both hands on the table and was regarding him with staring eyes. Suddenly he recollected himself and, dropping back, started to eat his toast and eggs feverishly.

"I am glad you are seeing something of Caroline," he said, apropos of nothing. "She needs young companionship, and—and not so much of Barry's society."

Brent started as if stung and for a second his host's face danced before his eyes, then his head cleared as Pierre entered with a note.

"For M'sieu Langhorne," he announced.

"Put it down," testily; "and get some hot toast, Pierre. Bah! I shall have to change cooks." Turning to Brent; "Barry should be down by this hour; however," with an impatient shrug of his shoulders, "he shows little consideration for the servants."

"I'll go after him," and before Endicott could check him, had he so desired, Brent was out of the room.

Langhorne was dressing leisurely when Brent's knock sounded on his bedroom door.

"Come in, Freddy, and close that door," exclaimed the latter at sight of his cousin. "What are you doing here so early?"

"Eating breakfast with the professor," briefly. "He's a bit angry over your lazy habits."

"So?" Langhorne selected a tie with care. "The old gentleman is rather touchy these days." He looked sidelong in the mirror, and his lips curled into a suspicion of a smile at sight of Brent's savage expression. "What's gone wrong with you?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" imitating his tone. "The professor's sour temper seems to be catching. Fortunately it is not inherited by his daughter."

"Caroline is different." Brent paced back and forth, too nervous to sit down. "She's unsophisticated—"

"If you mean by that, charming, I agree with you," declared Langhorne warmly. "In fact, she's more than charming—" But his cousin did not permit him to finish his sentence.

"Caroline's inexperienced." Brent crammed his hands in his pockets and turned half pleadingly to his handsome cousin. "Can't you see she hasn't learned by experience?"

"Learned what?" swiftly.

"Life."

Barry laughed outright. "Why so tragic?" He slapped his cousin lightly on the shoulder. "Don't you know by this time that a woman never learns by experience because she doesn't live long enough?"

"Mary didn't, anyway." The words slipped from

Brent almost in a whisper, but Langhorne caught them and his whole expression changed.

"What the devil do you mean?" he demanded hotly.

Brent resumed his restless walk about the bedroom, kicking Langhorne's soiled shirt, which had fallen off the bed, out of his way.

"The police appear completely baffled," he said suddenly, half incoherently.

"So it appears," agreed Langhorne. "They cannot understand a murder without a motive and one that is without reason."

Twice Brent strode back and forth before his cousin, then halted directly in front of him.

"I was in Philadelphia on business the day after your wedding—"

"So you were," Langhorne nodded affirmatively as his cousin paused. "I knew it."

"But you didn't know that I went to the Bellevue-Stratford to call on you and Mary." Brent spoke in deadly earnest and reckless disregard of consequences. "And I found only Mary had registered the night before—you deserted her on her wedding day."

A rap on the door and the butler appeared.

"M'sieu Brent"—Pierre's words tumbled over each other. "Ze office, she telephone you zat M'sieu Carl Ashby is dead—poisoned."

"My God!" The blood drained from Brent's face,

leaving it ghastly. He whirled on his cousin. "You—Barry—"

"Get out!" succinctly. "Both you—and Pierre," and picking up his military hair brushes Langhorne turned his back to them and continued his toilet.

CHAPTER XV

SUSPICION

THE toast on the breakfast tray was temptingly near Zeto's nose. The Airedale's mouth watered and his eyes, fixed steadfastly on Caroline, pleaded dumbly for attention. Suddenly a large paw came down on her lap and Caroline awoke from her abstraction.

"Gracious, Zeto, how you scared me," she exclaimed, hugging the dog to her; she could lavish affection on him without fear of rebuff. "There, take all the breakfast you want; Pierre will think I've eaten it; not all at once, stupid. Beg properly, Zeto."

For ten minutes or more his mistress put the Airedale through his tricks. Her uncle had purchased him six months before from a London "Bobby," and he had received his training with other police dogs. Obedient to the lessons learned in England under his skilled teachers, Zeto waited for permission from Caroline before eating each delectable morsel.

"You've had enough, Zeto." She shook an admonishing finger at the Airedale. "Remember, you are not to eat another piece of food in this house; no, don't touch!" as Zeto sniffed suggestively at the one remain-

ing butter ball. Caroline turned and peered inside the small coffeepot belonging to the china breakfast set to make sure that it was empty. Coffee was the one thing she craved; she felt the need of its stimulating qualities. Pouring the last drop into her cup she drained it and pushed back her chair.

It took but a second or two to change her becoming negligee for a simple morning gown, and after that she put away the silk stockings, worn the night before, which she had carefully washed when first arising. To replace the hem of her white evening gown required a little more time, although she sewed rapidly and with skill; it was one of the accomplishments she had learned at her convent school, which she had attended in Paris, following the close of the World War.

When Caroline was finally ready to leave the bedroom, she found Zeto lying by the door, his head and ears cocked in a listening attitude and his nose pressed close to the crack of the door-jamb. At a word from her the dog stood up and backed away as she opened the door, but before she thought to stop him, he was down the hall and out of sight.

Caroline followed almost on a run; suppose Zeto had made for Mrs. Endicott's suite of rooms? He had shown, on their arrival, a most unfortunate desire to dog her stepmother's footsteps, which had served to aggravate Mrs. Endicott's dislike of all canines into active hatred of Zeto. She slackened her speed as she

came in sight of Zeto standing in front of the boudoir door and examining a breakfast tray which had been placed on the floor for Pierre, when his duties permitted, to take downstairs to the kitchen.

"No, Zeto; don't eat, don't even touch!" Caroline spoke sharply and the Airedale backed away from the tray. "Come downstairs," and she laid her hand on his collar just as the boudoir door opened and Mrs. Endicott peered out.

Zeto almost slipped through Caroline's paralyzed fingers as he tugged at his collar. Was this wraith her stepmother? Gaunt, almost attenuated, her white hair massed untidily on her head; her skin, wrinkled, dead white, without a hint of powder, hung almost in folds on her cheeks; only Mrs. Endicott's eyes, deep-sunken, burned with the fire of unquenched fury. She reached forward and gripped Caroline's arm with a strength which startled the young girl almost as much as her appearance.

"Who was the man who passed down this hall a moment ago?" she demanded. "Don't lie to me."

"I don't know. I'm telling you the truth," incoherently. "Indeed, Aunt Martha, I didn't see any man." Caroline had not been able to bring herself to call Mrs. Endicott "Mother," and in the few letters she had ever received from her father he had spoken of his second wife as "Your Aunt Martha," so she had early adopted that style of address for her stepmother.

"You didn't?" in obvious unbelief. "Well, your dog did, and if it hadn't been for that food on that tray he'd have gotten him."

Caroline shook her head. "If Zeto had been after any one, he'd never have given up the chase," she said. "But, Aunt Martha, oughtn't you to be in bed?" regarding with growing alarm her stepmother's swaying figure.

But Mrs. Endicott looked up and down the hall, then pulled Caroline closer to her.

"Keep that dog back," she maneuvered so that Caroline stood between her and Zeto, and then placed her lips almost against the young girl's ear. "Is Barry Langhorne in this house?"

"Why, he was last night." Caroline's wonderment grew, also her embarrassment. Was it possible that Mrs. Endicott did not know her son-in-law had been a house guest since Mary's funeral? If so, she certainly was letting the cat out of the bag; but what possible object was there in keeping Langhorne's presence a secret?

"So!" The ejaculation escaped Mrs. Endicott unwittingly; for a second there was fear in her eyes. Turning blindly she stumbled back into the boudoir and Caroline, afraid to release her hold on Zeto to go to her assistance, waited in uncertainly until her stepmother was joined by the day nurse, Mrs. Mason, who,

busily engaged in preparing some medicine in the bathroom, had just missed her patient.

Still grasping Zeto's collar, Caroline went down the back stairs and into the garden where she released him and scurried back into the house in time to avoid his rush. For a few seconds she watched the Airedale's efforts to persuade her to open the door; having had his exercise earlier that morning under Pierre's friendly guidance, he objected to being turned loose again without Caroline's company.

The sound of voices coming from the kitchen reached Caroline through the partly open door and she unintentionally overheard the cook's vitriolic opinion of the "masters" who interfered in household affairs and of Professor Endicott in particular, whose strictures upon his breakfast had been retold by Pierre with a few embellishment called forth by a cup of lukewarm tea which did not suit the fastidious tastes of the little Frenchman.

"An' it's me belief," went on the irate Irishwoman, "that Mister Endicott's takin' his evil temper out on that poor young thing, his da'ter."

Caroline's cheeks were burning as she walked away. To be pitied by her father's servants!

There was only the morning paper to be found in the living room and Caroline listlessly turned its pages, her thoughts elsewhere. Life in her father's house, she could not say "home," was rapidly becoming intoler-

able; everything that she did met with disfavor, neither her father nor her stepmother evinced any desire for her society. To do them justice, even in her bitterness of spirit, she was willing to admit that the conditions under which they were all living, were not normal. The brutal murder of Mary Langhorne, with its attendant mystery, was calculated to shake the stoutest nerves, and it was not surprising that a devoted mother had broken under the strain. But as Caroline's mind went back to the first few days of her stay in Washington, little incidents, which made but slight impression at the time, recurred to her; Mrs. Endicott's irritability, her intense nervousness, and Mary's feverish gayety with its attendant moments of dark depression—never having known either mother or daughter before, it did not occur to Caroline that there was anything abnormal in their conduct, nor in Professor Endicott's lengthening absences from home. The latter had been attributed to professional matters requiring his attention, regardless of the hour.

As Caroline considered past events, trivial as they were, her desire to return to her aunt and uncle in England grew greater. But her father had refused to give her any passage money, and she had less than twenty dollars remaining of her allowance. She was not afraid of work. Her face brightened at the thought, then fell; where could she obtain employment? She was a stranger in a strange land, her only ac-

quaintances Barry Langhorne and Freddy Brent. To be sure Langhorne was a United States Senator and she had always understood that they had unlimited influence, but even if she found employment, would her father permit her to accept a position? She was not yet of age.

She laid aside the newspaper and opened the mahogany secretary. It took her a minute or two to find a sheet of note paper and a pen that she could use; the first one spattered the ink over the paper, the second was no better, but the third was new and she practiced with it, writing first her name and then the letters of the alphabet; she came out of her preoccupation to see that she had scrawled small P.P.C.'s over half a sheet.

Discarding the latter, she found another and started a letter to Barry Langhorne, but she had barely written his name when she paused in uncertainty. She had at first thought it easier to put her request in writing but she could not think how to phrase it properly. Besides, she colored even at the recollection, Langhorne had left her quite casually at the Naval Observatory and, so far as she knew, never found out if she reached home safely or not, nor had she had one word of apology from him for his conduct. Most decidedly she was not going to ask any favors of him, no matter how pressing her need!

In a small fury, Caroline tore up the sheet of

paper and scattered the scraps in the trash basket at the side of the secretary. The thought of Langhorne had conjured up Carl Ashby as she had found him, dying in his chair. The scene had haunted her dreams and her waking hours, had spoiled her appetite, and had made her almost a nervous wreck; only Zeto's dumb companionship had saved her reason through the long, long night. Intuitively she had realized that no human effort could have saved Ashby's life, but if only she had gone immediately into the dining room she might have been in time to be of aid —oh, if she had not gone to his house at all!

Unable to sit still any longer, she sprang up. In the dining room she found Pierre busily engaged in putting the silver he had been cleaning back in place.

"Where is everybody, Pierre?" she demanded. "Dad and Mr. Langhorne?"

"Zay haf gone wiz M'sieu Brent to ze house where M'sieu Ashby did live." Pierre laid down the chamois and spoke with deliberation and a due regard for his broken English; he wished to make himself understood, forgetting, in his eagerness to be the bearer of exciting news, that Caroline spoke French. "Mr. Ashby haf been poisoned."

"Poisoned!" Caroline was unconscious that she spoke aloud; her eyes were fixed on Pierre in dazed horror; suddenly her knees gave way under her and she

collapsed into the nearest chair. "Oh, what are you saying, Pierre? Poisoned!"

"But, yes!" The Frenchman's gesticulations were eminently characteristic of his nationality. "Poisoned —dead!" The last two words were hissed between his teeth. "I work for heem once, yes, in Paris, and M'sieu Ashby, he gave me ze lattaire of recommendation to your fazzer."

The Frenchman's chatter passed unheeded; Caroline's benumbed brain grasped but one fact—that Carl Ashby had not died, as she had supposed, from a heart attack, but had been poisoned. It was unbelievable, horrible! What was that Pierre was saying?

"I like not zis neighborhood, Mam'selle!" He shook his head. "First Mam'selle Mary die from ze knife stab an' now—zis!"

Caroline listened dully at first, then as the words took meaning her blood turned to water. She had not been the only one to enter Carl Ashby's hospitably open door last night—was that other her father? And had he gone with the same thought in mind, that Carl Ashby might hold the key to the mystery surrounding the murder of Mary Langhorne? And had that knowledge brought about the artist's untimely death? Something snapped inside Caroline's head, there was the roar of a thousand Niagaras in her ears, and she slipped limply from her seat to the floor.

Pierre cast one terrified look at her and bolted from

the room. His rap at the boudoir door brought Mrs. Mason and she listened to his incoherent plea for aid in bewilderment.

"Get Miss Holt," she suggested; "I cannot leave Mrs. Endicott just this minute. Here's a bottle of smelling salts," snatching it from a table, but Pierre was halfway down the hall by that time.

When Caroline next opened her eyes she gazed in bewilderment at Miss Holt standing above her. "Why, what's happened? Where am I?"

"In the living room on the couch," explained the trained nurse, soothingly. "You will feel better in a little while. Drink this," and obediently Caroline swallowed the ammonia and water. It was easier to close her eyes than to ask questions and the heavy steamer rug, which Pierre had brought from the hall closet and thrown over her, was comfortably warm and soft.

Miss Holt waited by her side for ten minutes or so and then, as Caroline still remained perfectly quiet, she drew a breath of relief. It had been quite a task reviving the young girl, but now that she was better, it would be safe to leave her until she could change her kimono for something warmer and return.

The trained nurse turned away and put down the glass and bottle of spirits of ammonia on the secretary. Reaching across the slight space intervening between it and a window, she unlocked and opened the

latter a trifle; the room was unquestionably warm. With one last look at Caroline to make certain that she was resting quietly, Miss Holt hurried upstairs.

She had been gone but a bare five minutes when her place at the low window, only on the outside, was taken by another. A look into the room convinced the intruder that he could enter undisturbed. Pushing the window further open, he scrambled inside, but once there he would have retreated precipitously at sight of Caroline, except that her closed eyes and regular breathing convinced him that she was asleep. The secretary was his objective and with an air of assurance, he pulled open one of the drawers, touched a spring and ran his hand through the secret opening thus revealed. His search was barren of result, and he ground his teeth in a blending of rage and disappointment.

Happening to glance outside the window he caught a glimpse of a boy coming up the walk to the front door carrying a box under his arm. Slipping noiselessly through the living room and hall, the man was at the front door and had it open before the boy could ring the bell.

"For Miss Endicott," mumbled the latter, and thrust the box of flowers through the small opening allowed by the man on the other side of the door; turning he ran for his delivery wagon standing far down the block.

Footsteps sounded on the floor above and came

nearer, while from the direction of the pantry came the sound of a female voice uplifted in song; Caroline also was stirring on her couch—no retreat that way.

The man hesitated, then looked outside the vestibule—a policeman was coming along the sidewalk, swinging his stick. Jerking back his head the man stood his ground, cap in one hand and box in the other.

"For Miss Endicott," he announced, as Miss Holt stopped at the foot of the staircase and stared at him. "Can I have a drink of water, Miss?"

"Certainly, if you go to the kitchen entrance." Behind her glasses the nurse regarded him attentively and each feature was registered in her retentive memory. "Let me have the box."

Miss Holt stood in the doorway and watched him walk toward the back of the house, then with puckered brow she closed the front door. She did not go immediately to Caroline, however, but remained where she was regarding the box of flowers in some uncertainty. The box bore the florist's name, arranged as a trade mark, and a fancy cord was wound about it with an envelope attached. Miss Holt found the envelope unsealed. Turning back the flap with care she looked inside and was able to read the man's name on the card. It was more than five minutes before she went again into the living room and her face was exceedingly serious.

Caroline sat up at her approach. "You have been very good to me," she said. "I'm afraid I made a fool of myself by fainting."

Miss Holt smiled. "You pretty nearly scared Pierre out of his wits," she replied. "I have seldom seen a more agitated human being. What upset you?"

"Pierre told me that Mr. Ashby had been poisoned." Raising troubled eyes to the nurse's bespectacled countenance, "It's very shocking."

"Horrible," agreed Miss Holt, with a catch in her voice. "And right on top of Mrs. Langhorne's murder." Caroline flinched, in spite of her effort to control her expression. "Did you know Mr. Ashby well?"

"Oh, no. I—we never met." Her eyes fell suddenly. "What is the box you have there?"

Miss Holt laid it in her lap. "For you," she stated briefly.

Caroline's surprised ejaculation contained incredulity. "Who can be sending me flowers?" She lifted the lid of the box and buried her face in the fragrant roses. "Why"—tearing the envelope off the card—her voice dropped away and the carmine mounted to her cheeks, dyeing them the exquisite pink of the roses. The name written on the card was that of the man in her thoughts—Barry Langhorne.

"Please, Miss Holt, hand me that vase over there," and as the nurse turned to comply with her request, Caroline thrust the card inside her dress.

Miss Holt watched her arrange the roses with a deft touch; she did not offer to help, nor did she comment when Caroline broke one of the long stems and thrust the rose in her belt.

"Your friend has good taste," she remarked reflectively, "in flowers, but I wonder why he selected the messenger he did?"

Caroline looked at her inquiringly. "Messenger?"

"Yes; I took them in at the door." Miss Holt paused and drew a small newspaper clipping from the pocket of her starched uniform and spread it out. "I have a very good memory for faces, and this is the man who came with the box—Ernest Page, driver of the death car."

Caroline sat back, chilled—she had lost her taste for flowers.

CHAPTER XVI

A TREACHEROUS GAME

THE treasurer of the Metropolis Bank of Washington leaned back and touched a buzzer on his desk; his directions to the clerk who responded were brief and to the point, then he turned again to the man sitting across from him in the president's private office.

"You say that your wife died without making a will, Senator Langhorne?" he asked.

"I understand she did." Langhorne fiddled with the stick lying across his knees for a second. "I have to-day taken out papers of administration," laying some documents before the treasurer, who looked at them closely.

"Mrs. Langhorne was not of age"— The treasurer, James Walker, was studying Langhorne while not appearing to do so. "And her mother, Mrs. Endicott, was her legal guardian."

"But that guardianship ended with her marriage," broke in Langhorne, "according to her father's will; see, here is an attested copy," drawing from an inside pocket several typed pages bearing official seals. "It came to-day from the Registrar of Wills in Boston."

With painstaking care Mr. Walker read each of the five closely typed sheets, conning over different phrases which particularly attracted his attention and making verbal comments as he went along. "Mrs. Endicott has only a life interest, I see, and the majority of her first husband's property goes to the daughter, Mary Wagstaff." The treasurer paused and folded the document. "The construction you put on the terms of the will are quite correct, Senator; Mrs. Endicott ceased to be her daughter's guardian upon your marriage."

There was a brief silence as the treasurer refolded the will and returned it to Langhorne with several other documents; it was not until they were all safely stowed away in an inside pocket that the latter addressed Walker.

"Mr. Wagstaff left a large estate," he said. "Did my wife carry a bank account or was it in her mother's name?"

Walker considered before replying. Senator Langhorne was himself a depositor of long standing in the bank, incidentally they were old friends and belonged to the same clubs and political party.

"Mary Wagstaff carried a regular account here, just a checking account, however, of several hundred a month," he stated finally; "to be exact there is $475 to her credit now." Walker paused again and his manner gained in seriousness. "I happen to be conversant with this subject, not because of her brutal

murder, which horrified all Washington," with a pitying look at Langhorne, "but because of several occurrences in the past four to six months."

"What were they?" questioned Langhorne, making no effort to suppress his eagerness.

The treasurer's reply was checked by the entrance of the bank clerk, who deposited a number of long yellow envelopes and a paper, with notations upon it, in front of Walker and departed.

"Fully six months ago Mrs. Endicott came to see me and stated that she wished to consult me about reinvesting some of her daughter's principal, and I gave her a list of what we then considered first-class securities in bonds and stocks, and, I may say incidentally, that our faith in these securities has been amply justified since then," interpolated Walker.

"How much money was involved?" questioned Langhorne swiftly.

"Around five hundred thousand dollars."

A whistle escaped Langhorne. "So much!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," briefly. "Mrs. Endicott said that some of it was the proceeds of a real-estate deal, the rest was from the sale of stocks and bonds which she brought to me every little while to dispose of," added Walker. "I gave the matter no particular thought until suddenly I realized that she was not repurchasing any stock or bonds, such as I had suggested."

"Well, go on," prompted Langhorne, impatiently.

"Of course she did not have to buy securities through us," continued Walker. "One day I asked her point blank if she had invested in certain bonds, and she replied in the negative, but her manner was so, oh, well, so odd, that it made a lingering impression." He stopped, unlocked a desk drawer and ran through a letter file, finally locating the sheet of note paper he was looking for. "Here, read that."

Langhorne scanned the letterhead of an internationally known jeweler and then read the few lines typed on the sheet. It was simply a request for information as to Mrs. Endicott's financial standing.

"It is not unusual to receive such requests," explained Walker, returning the note to his letter file and locking the drawer. "However, that was only one of numerous letters asking about Mrs. Endicott's wealth and business probity—but they all came from—jewelers."

"So!" The single involuntary ejaculation escaped Langhorne, then he sat quietly waiting while Walker sorted out the canceled checks taken from the envelope in front of him.

"Here is the list of securities we sold for Mrs. Endicott," the treasurer explained, taking up the paper with its long list of names and figures. "The sum realized for her totaled well over three hundred thousand dollars."

"Sold within the past six months?" asked Langhorne.

"Yes." Walker looked up. "However, I personally believe that Mrs. Endicott for the past year has been turning all her negotiable securities into cash."

"If that is so, she must have a large amount on deposit," commented Langhorne, thoughtfully. "In whose name did it stand, her own, or as guardian for her daughter, or"—with a penetrating glance not lost on Walker—"was it a joint account with her husband?"

"The amount referred to was handled by Mrs. Endicott, acting as guardian for her daughter, a minor," responded Walker cautiously.

"Then it is still credited to that account?"

The treasurer shook his head. "These checks for varying amounts were drawn on it." As he spoke, he shook the canceled vouchers out of their envelopes and on to the desk; in so doing several dropped into Langhorne's lap. "The majority are made payable to jewelers, both in this country and abroad." He waited patiently while Langhorne, commencing with those in his hand, went carefully over each check. One, attached to another by a turned-back corner, did not escape his notice, as it had that of Walker. With a sleight-of-hand trick, learned in boyhood, Langhorne pocketed the latter check before handing the others back to the treasurer.

"You doubtless wonder how these canceled checks are still in the bank's possession?" went on Walker. "Mrs. Endicott asked us to keep them until called for."

The two men regarded each other thoughtfully for a minute, then Langhorne let out his breath slowly and drew it in again. "From these," touching the papers on the desk, "and what you tell me, I judge that Mrs. Endicott has invested a small fortune in jewelry."

"Not too much emphasis on the *small* fortune," laughed Walker. "But however beautiful the jewels, there is one point about them that Mrs. Endicott overlooked."

"What is that?" quickly, reaching for his hat.

"That they do not bring in any income." Walker stood up as Langhorne arose. "As Mary Wagstaff died intestate you, as her husband, will inherit such property as she had."

"True." Langhorne paused with his hand on the door, which he had just opened. "And as administrator, I shall ask for a full accounting of my wife's estate." He spoke more loudly than he realized and his words reached Professor Endicott waiting by the elevator shaft to descend to the safe-deposit vaults in the basement. The professor's eyes blazed in sudden fiery wrath but the fingers he laid on the elevator button trembled like an aspen leaf.

Totally unaware of Endicott's proximity, Lang-

horne shook hands with Walker and left the bank. It was not until he was inside the limousine he had hired that morning and was driving down Pennsylvania Avenue on his way to the Senate Office Building that he again looked at the canceled check, which he had purloined under the eyes of the bank treasurer. His method of becoming possessed of it did not trouble him in the least, but the name on the check whitened his cheeks.

"Pay to the order of Carl Ashby"—the name was written in a feminine hand, and hurriedly, judging from the uneven letters, but it was not that, nor Mrs. Endicott's signature, nor the endorsement in Ashby's writing on the back, that riveted his attention. The date the check bore was the day of his marriage to Mary Wagstaff, and it was drawn for ten thousand dollars.

Pierre cast one hurried look behind him. Detective Barlow and Freddy Brent had turned into the long walk leading to the Endicott mansion and it behooved the butler to get there ahead of them. The Frenchman broke into a dog-trot and dodged between two clumps of old English boxwood, which Professor Endicott, after much search, had purchased in Virginia and had transplanted to decorate his lawn. Satisfied that he was out of sight, Pierre ran faster; hardly slackening his speed he took the steps leading to the kitchen entrance two

at a time. Paying no attention to the cook's entreaties to tell her something of the latest excitement in the neighborhood, he changed his coat and was at the front door as Brent pushed the bell for the second time.

"I thought I caught a glimpse of you among the sightseers at Mr. Ashby's bungalow, Pierre." Barlow turned pleasantly to the little Frenchman. "No?" as the latter shook his head. "My mistake."

"Is Professor Endicott in, Pierre?" Brent flung his hat and overcoat on a convenient chair in manifest impatience.

The butler looked inside the coat closet; the professor's hat was missing from its customary peg and knowing his master's methodical habits, the butler hazarded a guess.

"Non, M'sieu. Will you wait?" with a sweeping gesture toward the living room, but Brent brushed the suggestion aside, brusquely.

"In the sun parlor, yes; the 'phone's there, isn't it?" and stopping only long enough to take a wad of copy paper from his overcoat pocket, he followed the others to the back of the house. Making a beeline for the telephone instrument, the young reporter spread his copy carefully before him and, pencil in hand, rang up his chief.

Barlow stopped Pierre, as the butler turned back toward his pantry.

"Please tell Miss Caroline Endicott that I very

much wish to see her at once," he said and, as the servant bowed and withdrew, he sauntered over to Brent.

The latter looked up from his mass of notes and continued talking with his chief: "Go ahead, I'll dictate —sure. I understand—line clear?—O. K." then *sotto voce* to Barlow, "They've switched me on to the city editor's room direct, so I can't stop; try the professor's cigars. I can recommend them," with a faint chuckle as he pointed to a humidor on the smoking stand by the professor's reading chair near one of the windows.

Barlow followed his advice to the letter, even dropping down in the roomy armchair. For a minute or two he listened to Brent's short, crisp sentences describing the finding of Carl Ashby lying dead in his lonely bungalow. ". . . The police are looking for satisfactory results. . . . Carl Ashby, a recluse, more or less, owing to his physical infirmity, his deafness. . . . There is one outstanding angle in the case. . . ."

The detective, intending to knock the ashes from his cigar into the brass receiver on the smoking stand, dropped them instead in the arm pocket of the wicker chair in which he sat. It was a convenient repository for book or magazine, and he hastily dragged out the book it then contained and brushed the hot ashes from the leaves. As he snapped the leaves back and forth, he dislodged a scrap of paper. Picking it up to replace

it in the book, Barlow turned it over and the letters, P. P. C. caught his eye.

Propping the book open on his lap, the detective shot a questioning glance at Brent; the latter sat with his back partly turned, earnestly engaged in making the man at the other end of the wire understand what he was saying. Convinced that his movements were attracting no attention, Barlow drew out the scrap of paper which his assistant had found under the tray on Carl Ashby's dining-room table. Placed side by side, the two papers were identical, as were the three letters which each bore.

Handling them carefully, Barlow placed both papers in his vest pocket and looked at the book. It was an English publication of a popular novel by a famous author. After reading the title and the publisher's imprint, he turned to the flyleaf. Across the page, in bold lettering, ran Caroline Endicott's name. With eyes kindling, Barlow dropped the book into his coat pocket and looked up to find Miss Holt entering the sun parlor.

"Pierre told me you were waiting to see Miss Endicott," she said. "She went out in her father's car, oh, over an hour ago, and hasn't returned."

Barlow rose hastily. "I'm glad to see you," he exclaimed. "Suppose we go outside, though; our talking will disturb Mr. Brent."

The young reporter had caught only Caroline Endi-

cott's name and he eyed Barlow and the trained nurse wistfully as he continued dictating his story over the telephone. He wanted news of Caroline, but still more, he wanted to see her, to be with her, to watch her varying expressions, the half-shy, wholly trusting look in her eyes and the soft cadence of her voice. Mentally he cursed the slowness with which his story was being typed. From where he sat he was too far off to hear what was being said, but he could see the detective and Miss Holt in earnest conversation, and he had an excellent view of her pretty feet and ankles as she abstractedly rubbed one foot and then the other up and down her leg. Brent listened to the receiver repeating some of his dictation; he beat time to his agitated thoughts with his pencil against the mahogany table.

"Any news?" questioned Barlow eagerly as soon as he and the nurse were out of the sun parlor.

Miss Holt cast an uneasy look behind her. "Where is Pierre?" she asked.

Barlow made a cautious survey of the pantry and servants' dining room beyond it from whence came the Frenchman's tones raised in dramatic recital, his broken English more pronounced than ever as he described to an interested audience of the cook, house and scullery maids, his breaking the news to Professor Endicott and the others in the house that morning of

Carl Ashby's death. The detective tiptoed back to Miss Holt.

"No one can overhear us," he said. "How is Mrs. Endicott?"

"Not so well." Miss Holt looked as serious as she felt. "While her condition is not alarming, Professor Endicott has sent again for Dr. McLane."

"Too bad." Barlow frowned his disappointment. "I wanted very much to talk with her."

"You are not the only one," commented Miss Holt dryly. "Senator Langhorne is most insistent that he see her."

"What! Haven't they met since his wife was killed?" incredulously.

Miss Holt shook her head. "And what's more," she added, "Professor Endicott is determined that they shan't."

Barlow considered her information reflectively for a second. "A curious situation," he agreed. "And now we have the startling death of the famous artist, Carl Ashby, at his home only a short distance from the scene of Mary Langhorne's murder. Come, Miss Holt, with all your cleverness, surely you have been able to find some hint, some clue, even a faint one, as to the connection between Ashby and this household?"

She hesitated in uncertainty. From the sun parlor came the tap-tap of Brent's pencil on the mahogony

table, louder, slower, then more rapidly as his thoughts churned along.

"When I was here before, Mr. Ashby had about completed Mrs. Endicott's portrait." Miss Holt's troubled tones broke the stillness. "Mrs. Endicott seemed very fond of him, and even encouraged the incipient flirtation between him and her daughter, Mary."

"Hah!" Barlow's ejaculation indicated a feeling of elation. "So now we are getting to it! Then there was a love affair between Mary and her artist neighbor! Were they ever engaged?"

Miss Holt paused and again in the stillness came the tap-tap of Brent's nimble pencil. Barlow waited in silence for the nurse to answer his question, which she seemed loath to do. He hardly noticed the lengthening pause, for his active mind had gone off at a tangent.

Miss Holt held up a small slipper and a note. "This is what you asked me for, Miss Endicott's slipper; and this note I found under Mrs. Endicott's pillow last night when making her bed," she explained. "If it doesn't have any bearing on the present situation, please keep its contents to yourself."

"I promise," declared Barlow with fervor, and he unfolded the note. He read it twice,—a third time, then glanced aghast at Miss Holt. "Good Lord, Carl Ashby must have jilted Mary Langhorne!"

She held out her hand. "Please," and reluctantly he returned the paper to her. "I must put it back under the pillow again, for Mrs. Endicott cannot be agitated by its loss."

Barlow thrust both hands in his pockets and stared at his companion.

"So Ashby jilted her," he muttered again. "Well, well! I wonder," his eyes sparkled at the thought, "I wonder if Senator Langhorne knew of their love affair?"

What reply Miss Holt would have made died on her lips as young Brent joined them.

"Did I understand you to say that Miss Caroline is out?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Brent. I am expecting her to return at any moment," with a glance at the grandfather clock in a corner of the staircase.

Barlow, who had been lost in thought for a second or two, looked up just as Brent started for the pantry door.

"Hold on, come back," he called. "Where are you going?"

"I wanted to ask Pierre if a box of flowers came for Miss Caroline before she went out," explained the young reporter and reached out his hand to open the door; it dropped to his side as Miss Holt answered him.

"It did! that is," correcting herself hastily, "a box

came," she paused as Brent gained her side. "Did you send her some flowers?"

"Yes;" in some embarrassment as he observed the spectacles focused on his crimsoning cheeks. "Did you say she got them all right?"

"Miss Endicott received some flowers," again Miss Holt paused; she was feeling her way. Brent's expression puzzled her. "But the card with them bore the name of Senator Barry Langhorne."

Miss Holt might have been puzzled a moment before, but there was no mistaking the smoldering wrath which lit Brent's eyes at her quiet statement; only by an effort did he keep back the oath on his lips.

"The box of flowers," went on Miss Holt, her quiet voice sounded very distinct in the stillness, and Pierre at the keyhole of the pantry door was able to follow what she said; "were brought to the house by Page, the driver of the car in which Mrs. Langhorne was found dead."

Barlow looked at them both with quickened interest. "You don't say!" he ejaculated. "Wait, Brent," as the reporter opened his lips to speak. "What you are hearing now is confidential—it's not for publication, you hear me. If it gets into print I'll deny every word of it."

"All right," sullenly.

"Good!" Barlow motioned to them both to draw closer. "Ever see this before?" and taking a silver

flask from his pocket, he held it up before them, turning it slowly around so that they could see both sides.

"Sure, I've seen it." It was Brent who spoke and Miss Holt again eyed him inquisitively. "It belongs to my cousin, Barry Langhorne."

Barlow's expression indicated lively satisfaction as he slipped the flask back into his pocket.

"I've had its contents tested," he remarked. "It contains sloe gin. Your cousin, Brent, has excellent taste in wine—and women."

CHAPTER XVII

ACCUSED

THE wind whipped Caroline Endicott's skirt about her knees, but it did not dislodge the small hat set so jauntily on her bobbed head. The narrow suspension bridge, leading from the Maryland shore to the largest island just below the Great Falls of the Potomac, shook and swayed dizzily under Zeto's galloping feet as he came charging after Caroline, and she gave a startled look over shoulder, clutching the guide ropes to steady herself.

"Stop, Zeto!" she called. "You'll have us both in the water; don't do that, keep still," but that was the last thing Zeto wished to do. In trying to pass her his hind foot shot off the edge of the bridge and he recovered himself with difficulty. Caroline's heart almost stood still. Why hadn't Thomas kept the dog in the car? Suppose his antics did precipitate them both into the Potomac River? The torrent racing through the gorge under her feet was terrifying to a poor swimmer.

She halted halfway across the bridge and apparently just over the deepest part of the torrent. There was no one in sight on either bank and pausing for an-

other quieting word to Zeto, who had come to a standstill at her side, she opened a large knitting bag and took from it a newspaper package to which was attached a stone. Some of the paper had come loose and she had a glimpse of a blood-stained knife blade as she flung it far off into the Potomac River. For several seconds she stood still watching the eddying water as it swirled around the spot where the knife had sunk, then she heaved a long, long sigh of relief. Until an hour before she had kept the knife in the false bottom of her trunk, but when questioning Miss Holt as to the interesting drives about Washington and learning of Great Falls and the view to be had from the suspension bridge, she had seized the opportunity to get rid of the tell-tale knife forever.

Thomas, the chauffeur, was pacing uneasily around when Caroline finally appeared with Zeto at her heels.

"I'll sit with you, Thomas," she exclaimed as the chauffeur held open the limousine door. "Zeto can occupy the back seat."

Caroline sat quietly in front enjoying the run toward Washington. The scenery along the Conduit Road was sufficiently diversified to prove interesting and the fresh, cold air beating against her cheeks stained them a more healthy color than they had worn for many hours. Thomas was not a chatty soul, and Caroline gave up trying to make him talk about motor cars and his favorite model.

They covered the distance with ever increasing speed, the sharp curves in the road multiplied and Caroline drew in her breath as they negotiated a corkscrew turn on two wheels.

"Aren't you going awfully fast, Thomas?" she questioned, trying to glimpse the speedometer as the limousine swung around another curve. "Fifty miles an hour, isn't it?"

"Yes, miss; but they ain't no traffic to speak of." Thomas did not remove his foot from the accelerator. "Professor Endicott told me to be at the Cosmos Club at six o'clock, sharp, an' it's close on that now."

"Well, I haven't any appointment in the graveyard, so slow up," and Caroline's imperative tone carried authority. "My father would rather have you late than a—a smashed car"—she had started to say mangled daughter, but the words stuck; so far he had shown more consideration for inanimate objects than for his daughter.

The car's speed diminished, but not materially; Thomas did not relish Caroline's lack of confidence in his skill; he was proud of his driving and he resented her giving him orders. His plans for the afternoon had been much upset by her demand for the limousine and he was still sore at being unable to keep "company" with the young girl of his choice.

Thomas' ill humor was entirely lost on the innocent cause of it. Caroline sat quiet as a mouse in her

corner on the front seat, her mind again occupied with the problems surrounding the death of Mary Langhorne and Carl Ashby. She had not yet seen her father nor Barry Langhorne; the roses had been the only word of communication she had received from the latter. And to take Ernest Page, the chauffeur of the death car, as his messenger! It was incredible! What web of circumstance united such varying characters as her father, an eminent scientist, a senator of the United States and a driver of a hired car? And there were Mary and Carl Ashby—what did their tragic deaths portend? More tragedy?

Caroline's heart contracted within her; in desperation she sought refuge from her sad thoughts in watching their onward progress through the outskirts of Washington. Thomas drove with more care as he proceeded through Georgetown, but when he came to Wisconsin Avenue he caught a glimpse of the clock on the instrument board—its hands pointed to twenty minutes of six and he threw caution to the winds. As he swung into Woodland Drive a motor cycle forged up to the front wheels and a uniformed traffic policeman signaled to him to stop at the side of the road.

"So, so," exclaimed the latter, as the limousine halted with a grinding of brakes. "Thomas, we've got you this time; forty-five miles an hour, son, will keep you in hock for some time, especially as this isn't your first offense." He was busy writing on a pad while he

spoke. "Come with me to the police precinct. The young lady, too," catching sight of Caroline as she bent forward around Thomas' stocky figure.

"Oh, must I?" Caroline's voice of consternation reached Detective Barlow's ears, an interested spectator of the small scene, and he stepped forward.

"It's not necessary for Miss Endicott to accompany you, Ryan," he said, and the traffic cop touched his hat. "I'll bring her into the police court, if necessary." He lingered on the last words and Caroline started at the menace in his tone. Pshaw! It was her wretched imagination getting the better of her judgment. She climbed out of the car with alacrity and released Zeto.

"I'll telephone Father, Thomas, and explain; don't worry," catching sight of the chauffeur's woebegone countenance. "I won't let him blame you."

"Thanks, Miss Caroline," and Thomas drove off in the wake of the motor cycle as Ryan led the way toward the Tennallytown precinct.

Caroline turned impulsively to Detective Barlow. "I'm very much obliged to you—"

"Don't mention it, Miss Endicott." He waved away her thanks. "Suppose you come in here and telephone your father?"

Caroline looked in the direction he pointed and stopped dead in her tracks; she was directly in front of the entrance to Carl Ashby's bungalow.

"Why, I thought I was home, or nearly there," she stammered. "I won't stop now, thanks."

"Oh, yes, you will." His tone, however, was still persuasive, although his words were not. "I've just come from your home and your father is not there."

Caroline moistened her lips; she would have given much for a drink of water. "Is he here at the bungalow?" she asked.

The detective smiled. "Not yet, but we are expecting him. Come in and wait."

But Caroline held back. "It's late, and I must dress for dinner, besides," with sudden hauteur which sat well upon her, "it's not my intention to go into a strange man's house."

Barlow smiled under cover of the gathering darkness. "I'm giving you a great opportunity, Miss Endicott; see, we have to keep a guard stationed here to prevent morbidly inclined visitors from strolling into Mr. Ashby's house."

"Well, I'm not one of them," with an honest shiver; "and I'm going home."

The detective did not move from in front of her path and his next words drove the color from her cheeks.

"Don't let's have a scene out here," he said pleasantly enough, but the hand on her arm was discouragingly firm. "Inspector Mitchell is waiting inside the bungalow to interview you."

"But why?"

"He will explain," patiently. "I have been at your house nearly all the afternoon waiting to bring you back here with me; it was fortunate we met as we did." He was guiding her along the walk to the front door as he spoke. It was opened on their approach by a plain-clothes policeman who saluted Barlow respectfully, while keeping an admiring eye on his companion.

"Which room do you prefer, Miss Endicott?" inquired Barlow softy. "The dining room or the studio?"

"Neither," stoutly. "The hall will do for my brief stay."

Their voices reached Inspector Mitchell and he came toward them from one of the back rooms.

"Ah, Miss Endicott, won't you take off your wraps?"

"No." Caroline looked up at the big man confronting her with a strange sinking of the heart. "What do you wish to see me about and why here?"

Mitchell glanced across her shoulder at his subordinate. "Close the front door, Barlow," he directed sharply. "Now, Miss Endicott, come this way," and he pulled back the portières in front of the entrance to the studio. "Please." And Caroline perforce obeyed him.

Barlow placed a chair for her in such a way that she practically confronted the portrait of Mary Langhorne, still resting on its easel.

"An excellent likeness," began Mitchell, stationing himself at her elbow. "Your stepsister was exceedingly good looking."

"Yes," frankly, looking up at him with grave eyes. "But she was not any blood kin of mine, simply a connection by marriage."

"But related by ties of affection?" with a rising inflection and Caroline took the statement as a question.

"True; I grew very fond of Mary; alas, I knew her only a very brief time." She turned uneasily in her seat. "Where is my dog, Zeto?"

"Somewhere in the house," carelessly. "You were on good terms with Mrs. Langhorne?"

"Why, certainly," and at her unhesitating answer the men exchanged glances.

"And Mrs. Langhorne was on good terms with the others—her mother?" Mitchell coughed slightly, "and your father?"

Caroline eyed her questioner sharply. What was he driving at?

"Certainly," she responded, trying to make her answer as spontaneous as her previous reply, and failing lamentably but Mitchell apparently did not notice either her hesitancy or her confusion.

"Miss Endicott," his voice gained a sterner quality. "Can you attribute any motive for the killing of young Mrs. Langhorne?"

"Wanton murder," she spread out her hands impulsively; "that is all."

Mitchell stroked his chin reflectively; his questions so far had gotten him nowhere. "Do you know," he commenced pleasantly, "you have never given a very clear account of your whereabouts on the night of the murder, that is, after Mrs. Langhorne left you in the Metropolitan Theater. Where did you go from there, Miss Endicott?"

"Home, and to bed," shortly.

At a sign from Mitchell, Detective Barlow stepped forward with an object in his hand which he thrust almost under Caroline's nose.

"Then how do you account for the peculiar mud on this slipper of yours?" he demanded.

Caroline stared at him dumbfounded; putting out her hand she turned the slipper this way and that.

"It's mine," she admitted in tones of unqualified amazement. "See the London shop mark," pointing to the bootmaker's name inside. "But I don't know any more about how the mud got on it than how the slipper came into your possession."

Mitchell waved away her last remark as unworthy of notice. "The mud on it, tested, shows that it came from that section of Massachusetts Park where Mrs. Langhorne was murdered," he stated. "You wore it that night and in that neighborhood."

"That's a lie!" Caroline's voice rang out in right-

eous indignation, and again the two men glanced at each other; their progress was *nil.*

"How about the blood-stained knife in your possession?"

Caroline's burst of hysterical laughter covered a rapidly beating heart. How came these two detectives to know of the knife? Fear clutched at her heart-strings, but, thank God, she could answer their question with the righteousness of truth.

"I have no knife in my possession," she declared. "As God is my witness, I have no such knife."

The portières drawn across the entrance to the studio were violently agitated as Aunt Dinah thrust her black face inside the room.

"Some one kum an' git dis hyar dawg," she begged. "He's mussin' up mah kitcken somethin' fearful!"

Caroline was the first to dart out of the studio, but the two men were close at her heels as she gained the kitchen. It was a model room, and at any other time she might have paused to admire the white walls, the spotless kettles and pans, the electric stove, the china closets and the old-fashioned red and black tiles which covered the floor, giving the kitchen one of its most attractive features. At the far corner, Zeto, with head to the ground, was digging up the tiles for dear life; he did not stop, even at Caroline's command, until he had dragged to light a bedraggled and torn piece of carpet.

The young girl dropped to her knees, chiefly because they gave way under her, but she concealed her weakness under pretense of examining the carpet.

"It's an automobile rug—the missing carpet from the death car," incoherently. "Oh, I knew it would be here!"

"Indeed, and may I ask the reason for your knowledge?" questioned a soft voice in her ear as Mitchell bent down.

"Zeto and I started to hunt for it, and he led me to the cottage," she began; her voice wandered off and she gazed in stupefaction at the rug; as it lay in her lap every defect showed up clearly—to one side was the distinct imprint of a club foot. Caroline's hand swept upward to the kitchen table, she clutched, not it, but a bowl of pancake batter and overturned it on the carpet.

"Laws, honey, whut yo' done?" moaned Aunt Dinah, as the yellow sticky batter oozed everywhere. "Is yo' dress done spoilt?"

"No, indeed." Caroline arose with Inspector Mitchell's aid. "Come, Zeto, we'll go."

"Not yet." Mitchell's large hand covered hers on the dog's collar. "There are several things you must explain," his voice deepening as he caught her rebellious look. "For instance, your familiarity with the location of the kitchen."

"Instinct," promptly.

Mitchell smiled with his lips only, his eyes were alert and watchful.

"Well, maybe," he admitted. "Instinct will do much for a woman. But tell me, how long have you been acquainted with Carl Ashby?"

"We never met."

"So?" Mitchell's eyebrows lifted skeptically, and he turned to the staring darky. "Have you seen this young lady here with Mr. Ashby?"

"No, sah, ain' nebber seen her befo'." Aunt Dinah moved over to the sink, clutching the carpet, which had caught and held most of the pancake batter. "I'll clean dis hyar rug fo' yo', Mist' Barlow, but how cum dat hole in de floo'?"

The detective looked up from his crouching position on the floor.

"There's a natural pocket here," he explained to Mitchell. "So deep," measuring with his hands; "it's formed by the two sides of the wall and the ceiling of the basement; the tiles were very neatly put back into place. The dog's a good trailer, I'll say that for him," with an admiring look at the Airedale. "He has saved us quite a search."

"Zeto never fails," declared Caroline, her pride in her pet for the moment banishing all else from her mind. "The London police trained him." She turned to leave the kitchen but Mitchell blocked the doorway and she paused again.

"Miss Endicott, come this way." Wheeling abruptly on his heel, Mitchell strode down the passageway. Caroline had but to follow him, for Barlow was at her heels. The inspector swung to his left and moved to one side of the room so that Caroline could see the bed and the still figure lying upon it.

With a horrified cry, she fell back against Barlow and the little detective caught her by the shoulders—otherwise she would have fallen to the floor.

"Miss Endicott." The constant repetition of her name grated again upon her dulled ears. "You declare that you and Mr. Ashby were not acquainted; but for all that he saw you on Monday—the night of Mary Langhorne's murder."

Valiantly Caroline pulled her wits together. "He may have," she admitted in little above a whisper; "the Metropolitan Theater seats a great many people and I wasn't the only one in the audience that night."

Mitchell's glance not only held admiration but a hint of respect. Going over to the bed, he beckoned Barlow to bring her nearer.

"If those lips could speak, they would accuse you of premeditated and cold-blooded murder," he stated with stern emphasis.

Caroline shuddered; for a second she closed her eyes to shut out the sight of Carl Ashby lying dead before her, then they opened and were upraised to Mitchell's forbidding face.

"If those still lips could speak now, they would proclaim my innocence," she stated without a tremor and her look held Mitchell's unwaveringly.

The prolonged pause was broken by the inspector. "Your finger prints here—" She broke in on him hotly.

"There are none of my finger prints here," she declared. "I defy you to produce and prove them mine."

Mitchell's stare grew intensified. "You are right about the finger prints," he acknowledged. "But we don't need them to prove that you were here last night." From his pockets he drew a number of photographs and selected one. "The science of photography in detecting crime is always developing; here we have something new," he paused and cleared his throat. "A photograph of the retina of Ashby's eye—the retina is, as you know, the inner coat of the eye, which receives the optical image." Again he paused and spoke even more slowly. "This photograph shows that the last thing Ashby's dying eyes looked upon was your face."

Caroline sagged back against Barlow; for fully two minutes she rested in his arms, limp, exhausted, her breath coming unevenly. A flask was thrust against her lips and she drank slowly, pantingly. Gradually she came to herself.

"Well?" questioned Mitchell, as she straightened up. "What have you to say?"

"Nothing." The stimulant had warmed her blood and cleared her brain. "I shall say nothing to either of you until I have consulted my lawyer."

"Ah, and who is he?"

For one brief second Caroline hesitated; whom did her father say looked after his legal affairs? The name eluded her; she must say something, some one. "Senator Langhorne," she announced quietly.

"So?" Varying intonations accompanied Mitchell's favorite ejaculation. "You are not the first of those we have questioned who has announced his intention to consult Senator Langhorne."

"Indeed?" politely. "And the others?"

"Oh, only one—Ernest Page, the taxi driver."

Caroline put out her hand to steady herself; when would the inquisition cease? Must she bear longer the barrage of questions? As she took a hesitating step toward the door, Barlow stopped her.

"Ever seen this flask?" he asked, turning it over so that the light fell upon it. "Well," as she kept silent. "that belongs to your lawyer friend, Senator Langhorne, and it contains the same liquor which concealed the poison used to kill Carl Ashby."

Caroline stood looking at them, her brain on fire and her face matching that of the dead man on the bed. Oh, God, how much should filial duty demand of her? When she spoke her voice was shaken, twisted almost to discord.

"I have seen that flask," she declared, "in the possession of the Senator's wife, Mary Langhorne."

Mitchell stared at her long and intently; suddenly he stepped forward and offered her his arm. "I'll see you home," he said. "Come, Miss Endicott."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DEVIL'S DISCIPLE

BARRY LANGHORNE dismissed his taxicab some distance from the Endicott mansion and instead of walking directly to it, turned into a well-worn path which bisected the vacant land to the east of the house. It had not been laid out in building lots and both trees and shrubbery grew there still in profusion. The path, by a circuitous route, led to the rear entrance of the terraced garden. Passing into the boxwood-bordered walks, Langhorne went to the garage, but his discreet knock on the side door brought only a series of barks from Zeto Zeus, whose rest he had disturbed. A brief wait convinced him that Thomas, the chauffeur, was not in his sleeping quarters over the garage.

A little way from the door was a window and it next engaged Langhorne's attention; not only was it unlocked but it opened noiselessly on its oiled hinges. Langhorne's lips curled into a smile; his tip to Thomas had been money well invested. From inside the window there came a subdued growl and the soft patter of padded feet as Zeto crept across the straw-covered floor of the small room converted to his use.

Langhorne's rubber-heeled shoes made no noise as he passed like a shadow through the garden and around the Endicott mansion. Light from softly shaded lamps shone through the lowered shades of the windows, but it was those on the second floor which chiefly concerned Langhorne as he made a tour of the building. In the windows of what he judged to be Mrs. Endicott's suite, he could see the shadows on the blinds of at least three people moving about; one he took to be a woman, possibly Mrs. Endicott, from her small stature; the other Professor Endicott; the third puzzled him in its elusive likeness to some one that he knew.

Pierre was winding the grandfather clock in the hall when Langhorne entered by the front door, and the butler came at once to take his hat and coat.

"Professaire Endicott ess upstairs wiz ze Madame," he stated, answering Langhorne's curt question. "An' Mam'selle Caroline ess"—he paused to hang the coat and hat in the hall closet.

"Is where?" broke in Langhorne impatiently. "Go on with what you were saying, Pierre."

"Ess ill." Pierre blinked at Langhorne's tone; it was one he had not heard before. "Zat ess, I took ze dinnaire up to her; she ess lying on ze chaise longue in her bedroom. Wait, M'sieu," as Langhorne moved away, and the Frenchman came close to his side. "M'sieu Brent dined wiz ze professaire to-night."

Langhorne turned back into the hall. "Has he gone?"

"Non, M'sieu; he awaits you in ze sun parlor," and Pierre, his message delivered, went back to his work.

For a minute or more Langhorne stood in deep thought, then, with tread as light as a cat, he swiftly mounted the stairs to the second floor. His trip down the hall toward Mrs. Endicott's boudoir was barren of results. From behind the closed door he caught indistinctly the murmur of voices and, turning back, he went into Professor Endicott's bedroom, the door of which was partly open. A survey of the room and its simple furnishings and he was once more in the hall, his footsteps entirely muffled by the strip of heavy carpet which ran down the center of it and the back hall, as well. Unaware that Pierre had reached the back hall at the same moment that he arrived at Caroline Endicott's door, Langhorne paused in indecision for one second, then with a gentle tap which pushed it still wider open, he addressed Caroline.

"Your door is hospitably open," he said. "May I accept the invitation?"

The girl looked up from the evening paper which she had been reading in feverish haste ever since Pierre had removed the dinner tray from the table by the side of the chaise longue, standing almost opposite the door of her room. Miss Holt had been in earlier and had insisted upon her going to bed, but Caroline

had refused. In spite of her exhausted condition, she was determined to see her father, and privately. Not equal to the ordeal of dinner downstairs, and having little appetite under any conditions, she had directed that only tea and toast be brought to her; however, the cook had amplified the simple repast with a plate of tempting creamed sweetbreads and a glass of sherry. This last was Pierre's contribution as, viewing Caroline's haggard face upon her return under Inspector Mitchell's escort, he deemed the stimulant necessary.

She had sent word twice to her father that she wished to see him, but so far Professor Endicott had not appeared and she had purposely left the door open that she might intercept him as he passed down the hall.

"Even Zeto is not here to play propriety," Caroline sat up straighter on the chaise longue. "But come in."

"Thanks." Langhorne's eyes had strayed down the hall at the sound of running footsteps and his smile widened at sight of Freddy Brent coming headlong up the stairs, two at a time. "Here's Freddy to see you, also, Miss Caroline; there's safety in numbers—and Dame Grundy will be appeased."

Brent had not caught all that his cousin had said, only the fact that he was to see Caroline really impressed him, and he brushed by Langhorne unceremoniously.

"It's rotten luck having you sick," he exclaimed.

"I counted so on seeing you at dinner," and her fingers tingled from the pressure of his hand.

"Take this chair, Freddy," and Langhorne quietly seated himself where he could look directly at Caroline and the young reporter.

Caroline's cheeks were a deeper color, possibly a reflected glow from the rich rose pink of her negligee, which, trimmed with swansdown, toned harmoniously with the silk eiderdown quilt tossed over her by Miss Holt an hour before. Langhorne's gaze strayed from her to the roses in their tall vase on the table, flanked by a corsage bouquet of violets which lay where her hand could reach them; their delicate perfume was faintly noticeable.

"I'm glad you are both here," she exclaimed. "I've been reading about," she was having some difficulty in keeping her lips from quivering from sheer nervousness, "about Carl Ashby's horrible death. The police," she avoided looking at either man. Was her face an open book? "The police seem to think it a case of murder."

"The police are fools," declared Langhorne with some vehemence; he paused as he caught Brent's swift, upward glance. "What's your opinion, Freddy; you've been over the ground with Detective Barlow?"

Brent studied his cousin and then gazed at the girl; obviously he was embarrassed. "There's something I feel you ought to know, Barry," he said after a pause

which neither of his companions attempted to break. "It didn't get in the papers."

"Well, what is it?" Langhorne rested his arm on the back of his chair and with his hand shielded his eyes from the light.

"They are connecting the two deaths—Mary's and Ashby's."

"Who are?" broke in Langhorne sharply; his gaze had shifted to Caroline.

"The police. They have discovered that—that Mary and Ashby were reported to be engaged."

"Were engaged." Langhorne's smooth tones corrected Brent's halting statement. "That is ancient history, Freddy."

"Not to them." Brent sought sympathy in Caroline's earnest look; his rôle of imparter of information was most distasteful to him. "Mary's death not so far away from the bungalow also strengthens Barlow's belief that the two murders are—are connected."

"And committed by the same person?" The question came from Caroline and Brent moved his chair closer to her side.

"Th-that's what they th-think," he stuttered; on closer inspection he noted the shadows under her eyes and the strained look about her mouth and he regarded her in growing concern.

Langhorne watched his companion in silence for a moment, his expression inscrutable.

"Well, and who is this murderer?" he asked, and his staccato tone caused both hearers to look up.

"God knows!" ejaculated Brent, half under his breath.

"True, He knows." Langhorne twisted slightly around; he thought he detected some one moving in the hall just beyond the partly opened door. "But the question is, do the police know?"

"Maybe, but they haven't told me," retorted Brent. Modifying his excited tones: "I have a theory—"

"Yes, go on," in marked impatience as the young man stopped, at a loss for words.

"Well, eh, why, eh, I'm inclined to think, knowing, eh, the, eh, affection between Mary and Ashby," he paused, overwhelmed with confusion. "I—oh, hang it all, Barry, forgive me, but mightn't it have been a love pact?"

Caroline caught her breath and her startled gaze swept Brent. How had he the temerity, or the heart, to make such a suggestion to the dead girl's husband? It was a second or so before she dared look at Langhorne; he still sat with his face partly shaded by his hand. Whatever his feelings, he controlled them admirably.

"Your suggestion, Freddy, presupposes a double suicide."

"Yes," agreed Brent softly.

Langhorne shook his head. "The medical evidence

proved conclusively that Mary did not kill herself," he stated. "And that materially alters your conclusions."

"In one way, yes"—the voice came from the doorway and all three gazed spellbound at Professor Endicott as the latter limped into the room. "I overheard what you said," laying his hand on Brent's shoulder as the young man started to rise. "Your theory is mine, with this modification," he hesitated and peered slowly about, and his voice, slightly rasping, echoed through the still room, "that Mary met Carl Ashby when leaving the theater, accidentally perhaps, or possibly premeditatedly," with a bitter look at Langhorne, who had also risen. "He hired a motor to bring her home and, in jealous fury, stabbed her. Later remorse drove him to suicide." His eyes traveled from one to the other and his lips twisted into a curious smile. "My theory has stricken you dumb, apparently."

Langhorne was the first to speak. "Your theory overlooks one factor concerned in the mystery of Mary's death," he said slowly. "And that factor is Ernest Page, the taxi driver."

Professor Endicott's grip on his walking stick tightened; it was not possible for his face to become more gray.

"From all accounts Page was befuddled with drink," he snarled rather than spoke the words. "His testimony will be held negligible by any jury of fair-minded men." Then in a sudden, uncontrollable outburst;

"Caroline is far from well; I think I must ask you both to leave at once."

Somewhat staggered by his abrupt dismissal, Brent shook hands with Caroline, his eyes saying more than any spoken words, and her color mounted as she turned to encounter Langhorne's sad gaze. Impulsively she held out her hand and the touch of his icy fingers shocked her into silence.

At the door Langhorne turned back and addressed Endicott in an undertone. "The agent for the Aetna Company told me this afternoon that Mary carried a heavy life insurance," he said, his eyes never leaving the professor's face. "It is made out in your wife's name."

Professor Endicott shut the bedroom door upon the Senator's retreating figure with an unmistakable slam, and turned furiously on Caroline.

"Langhorne is the devil's disciple," he declared bitterly, as he tramped around the room; suddenly he flung himself into the chair vacated a minute before by Freddy Brent. "Well, you wished to see me?"

"Yes." Caroline looked at her father and her courage failed. She had intended confiding in him all that had transpired that afternoon, but in his present mood, she shrank from it. "Have you found the purse I lost in St. John's Church during Mary's funeral?" she asked.

"Not yet." Endicott leaned back wearily; his emo-

tions tired him. "They tell me there is a woman sneak thief who attends church services there and elsewhere in Washington, and steals purses when the congregation is praying. Did you lose much?" slipping his hand inside his pocket. "Let me refund it."

"Only a pound or so—I mean dollars. Thank you, Dad," as Endicott laid two ten dollar bills on the table by her. "How is Aunt Martha to-night?"

"More comfortable." Under Endicott's beetling brows his eyes were burning as with a high fever. "Feeling better, daughter?" and he laid a hot, dry hand over hers. "We mustn't be a family of invalids." For a time he continued to stroke her hand absently; he came to himself with a start and rose. "Miss Holt will be in later to help you to bed." He hesitated at the foot of the couch. "About that knife you took away the other night—I want it."

Caroline's mouth dropped open; that was the last request she would ever have expected from him. "Oh, I haven't it!" she exclaimed.

"What?" loudly.

"I threw it away"—then catching his horrified look she added, with a fast beating heart: "Dad, the knife blade had blood on it!"

Across the length of the couch father and daughter stared at each other; the girl's heart was pounding almost to suffocation and her father's hand, clasped about

his stick, showed every vein, so tightly was the skin stretched across them.

"It was used to kill a chicken," his voice sounded hollow in the sudden stillness, and without another word he left the room.

It was some hours later when Professor Endicott relinquished his chair by his wife's bedside to Miss Holt, and after a few whispered words with the trained nurse, sought his own bedroom. Pausing only to turn on one light by his bed, he moved slowly about, removing first his coat and then his shoes. As he came out of the closet the long curtains before the window across from him parted and a man dropped through the open window.

"Ah, Page! you've come," with a swift glance over the man's shoulder as the taxi driver came closer, "via the porch roof."

"Sure." Page spoke in a husky whisper. "Ss-s-sh! Don't make a noise; these 'ere walls have ears. Let's get out an' do our talkin' elsewhere."

CHAPTER XIX

THE LIGHT THAT FAILED

CAROLINE opened the medicine closet in her bathroom and took down a bottle of bromide; selecting two tablets she drank the dose prescribed and refilling her glass with water, she turned to reënter her bedroom. Through a crack of the door she caught a glimpse of something moving by her bed. Startled, she put her hand on the tiled wall to steady herself, then with an intake of breath, she squared her shoulders and stepped into the room.

Between her and the high four-post bed was a woman standing on one of the small mahogony steps used to climb into it. Caroline watched her in silence, amazement depriving her of speech. The woman's back was turned and, swathed as she was from head to foot in an enveloping shawl, her movements were both slow and awkward. On reaching the top of the three mahogony steps, she did not sit on the bed, but walked upright, retaining an unsteady balance by clutching the heavy bed curtains at the side. It was not until she reached the carved post at the head of the bed that she turned sufficiently for Caroline to see her face.

The glass of water almost slipped through the girl's

paralyzed fingers— What was her stepmother doing clambering around her bed! Collecting her scattered wits, Caroline rushed to her side.

"Aunt Martha, let me help"—she set the glass of water on the bed stand and reached up both hands. "I'm afraid you'll fall."

Mrs. Endicott slid down on the bed pillows, her emaciated fingers running down the post in a vain attempt to check her tumble as her knees gave way under her. For a few seconds she lay panting on the bed.

"Hush! Don't make a noise," she gasped. "I just wanted a little exercise, just a little exercise"—her eyes closed weakly and her head lolled back on the pillow. Caroline looked distractedly about; it was close to midnight and every one in the house was probably asleep. Would it do to leave Mrs. Endicott long enough to summon Miss Holt? Pulling up the eiderdown quilt so that it covered her stepmother, she hurried to the hall door and almost ran into the trained nurse as she rushed down the hall.

"Have you seen Mrs. Endicott?" the latter asked. "In your room? Thank heaven!" And Caroline saw the perspiration caused by agitation on the nurse's forehead. "I thought her asleep and went to get the new bottle of medicine which Pierre neglected to bring upstairs."

"Wait." Caroline detained her just outside the door; she spoke in an imperative but cautious whisper.

"Miss Holt, tell me the truth. What ails my stepmother?"

The trained nurse hesitated. "Dr. McLane has called other doctors in consultation to-morrow and it will be known then," she spoke just loud enough to be heard by Caroline. "Mrs. Endicott has become a mental case."

Caroline stared at her in horror. "Mental case?" she repeated. "Do you mean she's mad?"

"As a March hare," tersely. "Your poor father has done everything he could to prevent that fact becoming known," and brushing by the girl, Miss Holt went over to Mrs. Endicott, who was sitting on the edge of the bed, crooning under her breath some childish lullaby. She made no demur as the nurse bundled her to her feet and with Caroline's bewildered assistance, got her to her own room.

Some ten minutes later Caroline snuggled down in her four-post bed, chilled to the bone, but her brain was a seething furnace. Mrs. Endicott mad! It was horrible, unbelievable—and yet, her condition, pitiful as it was, might explain many things; her father's conduct perhaps. What grief and responsibility must have been his, and to bear it in silence! And then, within the week Mary murdered, Carl Ashby, her former lover, dead also—poisoned!

Caroline shivered under the piled-up bedclothes. She must put such horrors out of her mind, if possible;

forget for a few hours the terrors of her scene with Inspector Mitchell in the bungalow—or she, too, would go mad.

From where she lay Caroline was faintly annoyed by a tiny ray of light shining in her eyes and she lifted her head to see where it was. The light was reflected in the mirror over her dressing-table and came through the hall door which she had left ajar hoping that Pierre would remember his promise to smuggle Zeto into the house and up to her bedroom. Pierre had said that he would be late, however. Slowly Caroline's eyelids closed as the bromide took effect and a delightful drowsiness dulled her excited brain. Burrowing still deeper into the soft pillows, she found a more comfortable position and soon her even breathing testified that she had at length fallen asleep.

The night had grown colder and Zeto Zeus moved restlessly about his quarters in the garage as the chilly wind came through the window which Barry Langhorne had earlier in the evening left open. Zeto finally pawed most of the straw into one corner and curled up on it for warmth. He had about made himself as comfortable as the situation permitted when the sound of subdued voices near at hand came to him, and the Airedale pricked up his ears. Both voices had a familiar ring and the dog lowered his head again, only to raise it a second later as steps approached the garage.

Something flew through the window and fell with a

thud on the floor, and Zeto's bark dropped to a muffled growl. Rising cautiously he sniffed along the floor until he came to a good sized piece of meat, thrown there a minute before. Zeto nosed around it, turning it over with his paw, playing with it as a cat with a mouse, his mouth watering all the time. He had gotten the meat buried in the straw when he heard again the same footsteps, this time approaching stealthily, and Zeto recognized them. His upper lip curled back, baring his strong, white teeth; then crouching down he rolled over on one side.

The garage window was opened still further and a flash of light played on the dog, lying with stiffened legs and closed eyes. "O. K!" and at the words a face appeared at the opening and was withdrawn with lightning swiftness.

Zeto listened until the retreating footsteps died away, then sprang up and, backing as far as space permitted, he cleared the window at one magnificent bound. As noiseless as other shadows, he sped through the garden and to the back of the Endicott mansion; the door there was closed, however, and he circled the house, going last to the pantry window, a little above the porch, on the first floor. It opened inward, not upward, and Zeto pressed his body against the frame work. In his haste to be gone, Pierre had not locked the window with his usual care, and under the weight of the dog's body the latch slipped out of its groove. Like a

flash Zeto was through the window and inside the house.

Caroline turned in bed and opened her eyes. What had aroused her? The room was entirely dark and she could barely make out the dim outlines of the familiar pieces of furniture. Rolling over on her side, she slipped her hand under the pillows—the cool linen was refreshing to her feverish skin. She was drowsily conscious that she was comfortable when her restless hand came in contact with a small, round object. Drawing it out from under the pillow, she turned it this way and that in her fingers. It felt like a smooth pebble or a round piece of glass, and, her curiosity aroused, she reached over to the bed table and switched on the electric lamp. The switch clicked in the socket but the light did not go on. Caroline sighed vexedly. She had spoken to the maid about the loose connection in the mechanism and the day before had asked her to have Pierre take the lamp to be repaired.

She dropped the small object on the table and heard it tinkle against the glass of water. Until that moment Caroline had forgotten the water; a drink would prove very refreshing, for the bromide had made her thirsty. As she held the glass to her lips, she paused and sniffed sleepily at its contents, the faint odor of bitter almonds was not disagreeable, however, and she again raised the glass to her lips, only to have

it dashed out of her hand as Zeto pushed his cold nose up to her face.

Regardless of the broken glass on the floor, Caroline's arms wrapped around Zeto as he clambered up and nestled down beside her. Pulling the eiderdown quilt over both of them, she stroked the dog, murmuring endearing names in his ear, and Zeto's whole body wriggled with joy. As the minutes passed, her voice ceased and she slept, but the dog did not.

A dim light flashed up from the direction of the door and played for an instant on Caroline's curly head lying face down on the pillows and over the hunched up quilt, then was switched off. With limping tread and as silent as a ghost, a figure approached the bed.

Underneath the quilt, Zeto's lips turned back, his muscles arched themselves and his head rose. As the creeping fingers drew nearer to the sleeping girl's throat, the dog launched himself upward at his unseen prey.

With a curse ringing in her ears Caroline awoke and half fell, half jumped out of bed. In the darkness she could not see what was happening. Rushing blindly toward the electric light switch on the wall, she pushed it up and down fruitlessly—the light failed to come on.

Zeto, hampered by the quilt, was struggling desperately to get at the throat of his adversary, while his body quivered under the brutal blows inflicted. Knocked half across the bed, he rose, freed from the entangling

quilt, and this time his spring caught the man full on the chest, and he and Zeto went to the floor, the fighting Airedale on top.

Caroline, standing breathless by the wall listened in horror to the sounds they made as man and dog rolled under the bed. She started forward, then halted at sight of two eyes peering into the room—eyes that were alive and saw in the dark.

The girl crouched back against her bureau and her shaking fingers closed over her electric torch and the handle of her heavy hunting crop. The feel of the latter in her right hand lent wings to her feet and strength to her arm as she raced across the room. They should not kill Zeto, they should not!

The leaded handle of the hunting crop came down on the head of the crouching figure just in front of her and the dagger intended for Zeto's back, buried itself in the floor as its owner dropped senseless.

"Zeto, Zeto!" Caroline's cry was lost in the noise made by the animal worrying his prey. "Oh, stop! Stop!"

The room had filled with people but Caroline was unconscious of their presence. As the light from her torch flashed on, it was focused on the club foot protruding from under the bed—it was inert, apparently lifeless.

Several men, she was not conscious who, dragged Zeto away and pushed the bed to one side. At sight

of the Airedale's bloody mouth Caroline's hands went to her eyes. An arm was thrown protectingly around her shaking figure, and a voice spoke in her ear.

"It's not what you think; do not be afraid—look."

Slowly Caroline opened her eyes, and Detective Barlow, who was stanching the flow of blood from the throat with towels, leaned to one side that she might look over his shoulder at the face of the man on the floor—Frederick Brent lay before her.

Caroline looked up and found that she was being supported by Barry Langhorne.

"Oh, I don't understand," she wailed. "Father!" and she pointed to the club foot.

"Just one of your father's shoes worn to incriminate him," explained Langhorne—his hold tightened as she swayed in his arms. "Brent was in league with an international crook to steal Mrs. Endicott's collection of valuable jewels."

"Yes, go on," she begged. "Who was the crook?"

The lights had gone on in the room as she spoke and Inspector Mitchell answered her question.

"Catherine Harris, alias Holt, and otherwise known as 'Cat-eye Katie,'" he pointed as he spoke to the erstwhile nurse who, her white uniform discarded for a black garment, sat dazedly looking at the handcuffs on her wrists. "A notorious confidence woman, known also for her peculiar ability to see in the dark."

CHAPTER XX

JOURNEYS END IN LOVERS MEETING

THE Sunday morning sunshine came pouring into Caroline Endicott's bedroom through the windows with their shades hoisted to the top. It shone on the overturned chairs, the great four-post bed pushed to one side, the disordered rug, and on Catherine Harris, alias Holt facing Inspector Mitchell and Detective Barlow. For over four hours their merciless questions had failed to draw a word from the ghastly woman confronting them. The crow's feet under her eyes were plainly discernible in the pitiless sunshine and her dead white complexion was devoid of rouge. Only her uncanny eyes, roving this way and that to avoid the light, seemed alive, she sat so still, so motionless. She did not even glance around at the opening and closing of the bedroom door and Barry Langhorne had to brush by her to reach Mitchell. The look on his face brought the inspector to his feet.

"Is Brent—gone?" he asked in an awed whisper.

Langhorne bowed his head. The silence was broken by a strangled sob which escaped Catherine Harris in spite of the hands clasped tightly across her mouth.

Langhorne's expression betrayed his loathing as he

glanced at her. "Brent was able to say a few words before he died." The nurse's hands dropped to her lap and she groped for her horn spectacles on the table in front of Mitchell, but Barlow was too quick for her and removed them beyond her reach. "You have the chief criminal here, Mitchell; Brent was but putty in her hands."

"Is that so?" Katie Harris' voice rose high, discordant. "And wasn't it he I was trying to help? Oh, God!" She wrung her hands in agony. "Ever since Monday night, when Mary Langhorne found us dividing some of her mother's jewelry and we killed her to quiet her, I've known no peace." The confession came in trembling, frantic words. "Now, I don't care —nothing matters." She bowed her head and sobs broke from her, uncontrolled, agonized.

"Drink this," and Mitchell held a glass of wine to her trembling lips a few minutes later. "There, feel better?"

The woman shook her head. "Nothing matters;" she repeated the words over and over in a heartbroken monotone. "And the sooner I die the better, the world won't be the same without Fred."

"When did you meet?" questioned Mitchell gently.

"After the War. I nursed him in England; oh, I'm a graduate nurse," noting Mitchell's skeptical expression. "And I'd have lived straight, maybe, if it hadn't been for my eyes and my husband."

"Red Ed Harris, whose peculiar medical practices made America too hot to hold him," supplemented Mitchell. "And so you both drifted to the Continent and wormed yourself into the confidence of trusting fools and fleeced them of hundreds of pounds."

"Something like that," the nurse admitted. "Ed was an expert blackmailer and women mostly were his victims, and then the husband of one of them got him" —she drew her finger across her throat to illustrate her meaning. "But not before he induced Fred Brent to join our gang. We were tipped off to the valuable jewelry Mrs. Endicott was buying in all parts of the world by one of her agents—not Carl Ashby, though he bought several pieces for her when last in Paris."

"Ah!" The exclamation escaped Langhorne unwittingly. "That accounts for the check which Mrs. Endicott paid Carl two weeks ago."

"Sure; I was present when she gave it to him, but I never did discover what she did with the pigeon-blood ruby." The nurse motioned to Barlow to refill the wine glass and drank its contents almost at a gulp.

"Monday night was planned for our grand coup," she continued, after a brief rest. "I had doped both Professor and Mrs. Endicott and I thought I had Mary Langhorne"—the nurse paused. "I found later her glass of toddy untouched in her bedroom." Again the woman hesitated and her expression changed. "Mary came upon us before we realized she was even

in the room. 'You are robbing mother,' she cried and swung on Fred. "You, a gentleman thief!' And her scorn raised the beast in him."

"Go on," urged Mitchell, as the woman's voice died away.

"Fred sprang at her and I cried to Mary to run; instead Mary slapped his face."— She faltered. "Fred snatched the dagger from the table and stabbed her." An uncontrollable shudder shook the nurse and again she emptied the wineglass. "We decided it was safer to get Mary's body out of the house, so Fred, who had kept his wits, slipped away, got his car and went down town to pick up Page who he knew bootlegged on the side, when he wasn't drunk. You know what happened after that."

"And what did you do when left alone with the dead woman?" questioned Mitchell swiftly.

"I covered up all evidence of the tragedy and dressed the body in the clothes Mary had worn to the theater." The words were spoken without feeling, but the opening and closing of her hands betokened the nervous tension she was under. "I didn't need lights, and there was little chance of discovery. Later I took the dagger to the third floor and placed it in Professor Endicott's desk drawer. No one saw Fred and me carry Mary's body completely covered with a steamer rug, to the parked taxi. It was a tough walk, especially as I had on a pair of slippers borrowed from Miss Endicott's

closet and Fred the shoe made to resemble Professor Endicott's club foot—oh, those were used to cover our tracks when stealing the jewels—we had our plans well laid for that."

"If so, why did you remove the carpet from the Cadillac?" questioned Langhorne swiftly.

"Miss Endicot's slippers were a tight fit and I couldn't stand them any longer," Katy Harris confessed. "I took them off by the taxi and inadvertently stepped on the carpet, so Fred, who often spent the night with Carl Ashby and had a key to his house, rushed up there with it."

"So!" Mitchell bent forward. "And Carl Ashby saw him, even if he couldn't hear him?"

"I don't know that he actually saw Fred," cautiously. "But something aroused his suspicions, for he went to see Mr. Barlow and then sent for Fred—"

"On Friday night?"

"Yes." The nurse moistened her dry lips. "I don't know what transpired, but I had given Fred some poison in case—" She broke down utterly as Barlow produced two small folded papers and spread them out so that all could read the letters, P. P. C., written upon them.

"What's the significance of P. P. C.?" he asked.

"'Prepare powder, Catherine,'" she answered dully. "It was Fred's way of asking me for a dose."

Langhorne whistled. "I never saw you and Fred

together and I've racked my brain wondering how you communicated with each other."

"That was Fred's cleverness." She made no concealment of her admiration. "If he saw me anywheres within hearing and he wanted to tell me anything, he'd just rap, apparently idly, on a table or chair, using the Morse code to get the message to me, and I'd answer by rubbing my right foot against my left ankle, or vice versa."

For the first time Barlow joined in the conversation. "But you both overlooked the fact that I know the Morse code also," he said. "And I caught Brent's message to you yesterday afternoon, and it gave me a hint as to your identity." Barlow could not refrain from a triumphant chuckle as the woman's face turned even whiter. "I was on my way to see Inspector Mitchell and talk over the new development and plans to verify it, when I met Miss Endicott and subjected her to a fearful ordeal at Ashby's bungalow, for which I am deeply ashamed. But," turning directly to the nurse, "why did you really aid me in detecting the criminal in the Webb case?"

"To establish an alibi," shrewdly. "If I worked with you, I wouldn't be apt to arouse suspicion. I tried to cop the jewels the first time I came to nurse Mrs. Endicott, but she got better and I had to leave without them." Suddenly Katie Harris tossed her arms above her head in a wild, imploring gesture. "Oh,

for God's sake, take me out of this room; I'll hear the dog gnawing at Fred's throat to the day of my death."

At a sign from the inspector, Barlow stepped to her side, and he half led, half carried her into the hall, but Langhorne stopped them at the door.

"Why did you plan so dastardly an attack on Miss Endicott?" he asked, sternly, addressing the nurse. "She had never harmed either of you."

Behind her glasses, which she had donned a moment before, the woman's eyes gleamed curiously. "There were two reasons; one, well, Fred saw too much of Miss Endicott for my peace of mind," she said, in little above a whisper; "secondly, Mrs. Endicott's mad desire to get in this room convinced us that she must have the jewels concealed here in spite of the fact that we searched it several nights ago, after we doped Miss Endicott."

"Did you find a clue to their hiding-place?" But ignoring the question, Catherine Harris went slowly down the hall and out of the house to the waiting patrol wagon.

Coming suddenly out of her stepmother's boudoir, Caroline Endicott caught a last glimpse of the small procession and halted irresolutely, thereby causing her father, just behind her, to run against her. Langhorne saw them both at the same time.

"Won't you come this way?" he asked and, as Caroline shrank back. Please come."

Her father gave her no opportunity to decline and with swift but halting gait led the way into her bedroom. Caroline tried to close her eyes to the disorderly appearance of the place, but the scenes of the night just past were too vividly in mind to have that do any good.

Inspector Mitchell's terse account of Catherine Harris' confession brought horrified exclamations from both his hearers.

"Now, sir," he exclaimed, turning to the professor. "What's your connection with Ernest Page, the taxi driver, whom you helped get away in your stepdaughter's old roadster last night, first trying to quiet the dog, Zeto, with a dose of poison."

"It wasn't poison," protested Endicott hotly; "just a sleeping powder. Occasionally a few friends have joined me in procuring some fine whiskey in Virginia, and I have employed Page when going on these excursions. In notifying him of my plans, I just sent him a blank card with the letters P. P. C. on it."

"Well, well!" ejaculated Mitchell, deeply interested. "And Page saw those letters scratched on the flask he took from Fred Brent, his mysterious passenger, on Monday night; he confounded him with you, and jumped to the conclusion you murdered your stepdaughter."

"Just so and blackmailed me," responded Endicott. "I didn't know any more about the flask than he did, nor the reason for the P. P. C. letters scratched on it.

I used them to mean 'Page, prepare Cadillac' for our trips."

Thrusting his hands in his pockets, Inspector Mitchell turned and stared at Endicott.

"Now that is solved, suppose you tell us where your wife hid her jewels," he said, after a pause.

But Endicott shook his head. "I don't know." he admitted. "My wife will tell no one; it has become a mania with her to secrete her jewels, even from me."

Unable to keep still, Caroline was pacing slowly up and down the room and finally brought up at the bed table, which had been shoved far to the left of the bed. Her wrist watch was still lying on it, for she had been too agitated when dressing to give it a thought. As she reached for the watch, she caught sight of a red stone lying on the white table cover and she picked it up instead. The feel of it reminded her of the smooth pebble which she thought she had found under her pillow during the night. Her startled exclamation brought the others to her side.

"Look!" she gasped incoherently, holding up the pigeon-blood ruby. "I found this under my pillow after Aunt Martha had climbed over the bed, like this" —and with Langhorne's assistance she clambered up on the four-poster and walked along its edge as she had seen Mrs. Endicott do the night before.

Reaching the beautiful old carved post, Caroline ran her hands up and down it, in imitation of the older

woman's action and Langhorne, catching her excitement, did likewise. Up and down their fingers traced each separate bit of carving, finally resting on the rounded bulge of the post about on a level with the mattress. As Langhorne exerted more strength in pushing against one of the carvings, it slid upward and disclosed a natural pocket formed in the hollow of the post, and in it lay countless precious stones.

Half an hour later Inspector Mitchell moved toward the door.

"I'll wait downstairs, Professor," he said. "My car's there and we can take your wife's jewels directly to your safe-deposit box in the bank. I wouldn't advise you to keep them here any longer."

"God forbid!" exclaimed Endicott vehemently. He paused before leaving the room. "Barry, I owe you a most abject apology. I—I—thought you had—had—"

"Murdered Mary?" Langhorne sighed. "Perhaps your suspicion was natural; frankly,I thought you were shielding Mrs. Endicott who, I was sure, was unbalanced mentally, and I have kept a strict watch upon you. So you see, Professor, you, also, have much to forgive," with one of his charming smiles. "But just a moment, sir; there is something which in justice I think you and Caroline should both know."

"What is it?" asked Endicott kindly, as his daughter came up to them.

It was some seconds before Langhorne answered; his attention being wholly centered on Caroline. He had tried vainly to meet her eyes ever since she had come into the room.

"After our marriage at Rockville," he began, "Mary and I boarded a train for Philadelphia. I had engaged a drawing room and left her there when I went to send you a wire from Baltimore; when I returned a few minutes later, Mary was in tears. She told me that she could no longer keep up the farce; that she had married me only out of pique because she had been jilted by Carl Ashby, and she asked me to give her back her freedom."

Langhorne paused and drew a long, long breath. Neither of his companions spoke and it was some seconds before he continued.

"Mary and I arranged to part in Philadelphia, so I left her at the Bellevue-Stratford and went to stay with a friend—a bachelor. While in constant touch with her, we did not meet again, and upon her decision to return to her mother, I left for western Pennsylvania to look after some important mining interests." Langhorne paused, then spoke even more slowly. "When I learned of Mary's death, I was horrified. I attributed it to suicide due to her distraught condition; then when I learned the wound could not have been self-inflicted, I at first thought of Carl Ashby. He and I had been roommates during our freshmen year, but I

had seen little of him since then, although he kept up his friendship with Fred Brent, who also belonged to our frat." He turned to Caroline. "What made you think of Carl?"

Quickly she told of seeing Ashby in Mary's room and at the funeral, and of following her father toward his bungalow Friday night.

"I went that way by mistake," explained Endicott, "and when I found it out, turned toward home. The man with me was Page. So you were there, Caroline, when Ashby died, but where was Fred Brent?"

"Gone by that time. Poor devil! If Fred had only used worthily the talents nature had given him, he'd have made a name for himself, but he was always incorrigible, untamed and he couldn't play straight." Langhorne took several nervous steps up and down the room. "I wasn't far behind you, Caroline; for when I found you had left the Observatory, I hastened to the bungalow."

"Good gracious! Why?"

"Because of the curiosity you had evinced about Ashby," quietly. "You called him up that aftrenoon—"

"And you answered the phone at his house—"

"Not at his house, but here," interrupted Langhorne quickly. "I was upstairs and the branch phone in the hall gave a faint ting-a-ling and supposing it was an outside call, I asked: 'Who is calling,' and when I

found you were trying to get Carl I hung up." Caroline gazed at him, too astonished to speak. "I rushed to the bungalow that night, saw poor Carl, came back here, found you had returned safely and notified the police by telephone."

"So that was it." Endicott drew a long breath. "God! It's been a horrible week. I—well, if it hadn't been for Caroline's intervention, I would have taken my own life in a moment of despondency. Caroline, dear child, go and get some rest; and, my dear"—he spoke haltingly and with unmistakable feeling. "I tried to keep my wife's pitiful condition from you to spare you more shock and worry. I was wrong, I see that now." He looked at her with eyes dim with emotion. "Forgive me, dear."

For a second they clung to each other in loving embrace as the barriers of misunderstanding and pride slipped away, then picking up the satchel in which they had packed the jewels, found secreted also in the other bed posts, Professor Endicott left them.

Langhorne broke the silence which threatened to become embarrassing.

"Caroline"—and his voice was low and tender. "Mary was the first to repent our mad marriage; she had love for but one man in her heart, and that man was Carl Ashby. And I—I did not know what love was—then. In happier days to come, will you give me—another chance?"

No answer; only the wildly beating heart so near his own.

"Caroline," his eyes were pleading for him. "Like Zeto, I would die for you."

Slowly, very slowly she looked up, a half teasing, wholly tender smile upon her lips. "Like Zeto—please live for me."

(3)

THE END